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STEAL YOUR DATA**
Every customer affected — act now!
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ADVERTS!
ADVERTS!**

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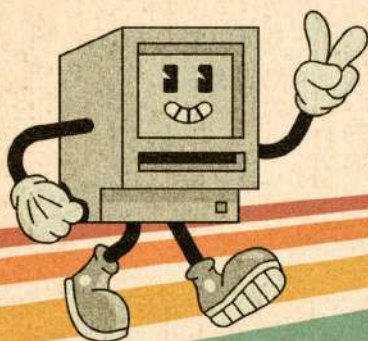
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I remember feeling a bit underwhelmed by the internet boom of the late 1990s. The huge potential was held back by sluggish dial-up speeds. Today's AI explosion is different. Hardware and infrastructure have kept pace with human ingenuity, so most of us have broadband fast enough and computers powerful enough to use the incredible new tools being released every week.

These have developed from the 'nice idea' phase to 'it actually works' remarkably quickly. For years it looked like AI would only benefit scientific research, but the

technology has already trickled down into the kind of stuff ordinary users are interested in: shopping, TV, email, travel, maps, photography, saving money – and almost any hobby you can think of.

Robert Irvine picks the best 50 of these in his Cover Feature. They won't help find a cure for dementia (we'll leave that to the experts: www.snipca.com/55605), but they'll prove useful every time you switch on your phone or PC. For the next phase in AI see page 7 (Google should be worried).

Daniel Booth

editor@computeractive.co.uk



THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

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24 minutes**

Battery life of Samsung's
Galaxy Tab S10 FE – **p24**



5Gbps
Top speed
of Sky's new
broadband
service – **p8**

3pm, 7/9/25
When the Government
will send the next
emergency alert test
– **p10**

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcass to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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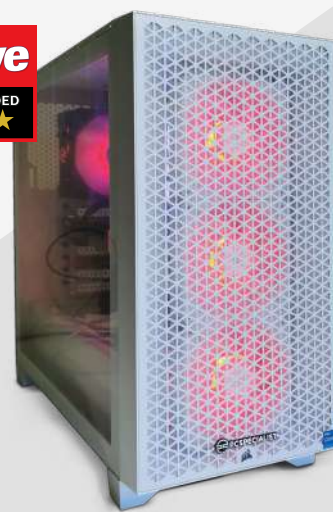
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Co-op hack: all 6.5m members should change passwords

Co-op customers have been urged to change their passwords immediately following a major hack that saw cyber-criminals steal details of all 6.5 million members.

WHAT WE THINK

This is the biggest theft of customer data in UK retail history, so it's shocking the Co-op took nearly three months to reveal its full extent. The company deserves the heavy fine regulators are likely to impose. Lawyers are also considering whether to raise a class-action lawsuit against the Co-op. Find out whether you might be eligible at www.snipca.com/55623. But also beware scams that promise compensation for the theft. This breach was so vast that criminals can exploit it in countless ways.

Shirine Khoury-Haq, boss of the Co-op, said the hackers stole names, addresses and contact information of its members, making it the biggest data breach ever reported by a UK retailer.

She added that no financial or transaction data was stolen, nor usernames and passwords. Members can continue to earn and spend rewards as usual.

However, enough information was taken for hackers to launch convincing scams targeting Co-op customers with emails and phone messages asking them to 'Reset your password' and 'Verify your account'.

If you use your Co-op password for any other account, you should change that too.

'Incredibly sorry' for theft

The Co-op was attacked at the end of April in a wave of hacks against UK retailers, including Harrods and M&S.

It initially said the breach

would have only a "small impact" on its call centre and back office.

But the problems quickly escalated, with the retailer unable to fill the shelves in some stores, while contactless payment systems stopped working.

Days later, the hackers contacted the BBC to claim that they had stolen customer and employee data. Co-op then admitted the criminals had "accessed data relating to a significant number of our current and past members". But it took until mid July for it to confirm that all customers were affected.

The hackers also stole customer data from M&S, which has spent millions of pounds recovering its IT systems. Harrods managed to thwart the attack before the hackers stole any data.

Khoury-Haq said she was



"incredibly sorry" for the theft, adding that the company "can't just stand back and hope it doesn't happen again – to us or to others".

It has teamed up with recruitment firm The Hacking Games, which specialises in finding cyber-security jobs for people with "unconventional talent" such as autism.

It will launch a pilot scheme in Co-op Academies Trust schools, a group of 38 schools across the north of England.

In July, the National Crime Agency arrested a 17-year-old British man from the West Midlands, a 19-year-old Latvian man from the West Midlands, a 19-year-old British man from London, and a 20-year-old British woman from Staffordshire in connection with the attack.

They were all arrested on suspicion of blackmail, money laundering and offences linked to the Computer Misuse Act, as well as belonging to an organised crime group. They've since been bailed pending further inquiries.

Read Co-op's FAQs on the attack at www.snipca.com/55620.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR PASSWORD

Visit www.coop.co.uk then click 'Sign in' at the top right. Type your email address and current password, then click Sign in.

Next, click Account at the top right followed by the 'Your account details' dropdown menu, then 'Change your details'. Now type your date of birth to confirm your identity, then

scroll down and click 'Change your password'.

Type your email address (1 in our screenshot) then click 'Send reset link' (2). Now visit that email account and click the 'Reset password' button in the email. It's valid for 24 hours.

Finally, type a new password then click 'Reset password and sign in'.



You'll like this... Microsoft might soon let you play audio through multiple speakers: www.snipca.com/55619

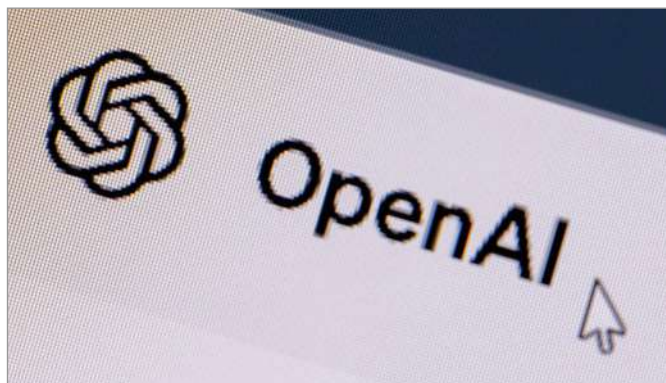


but not this... Hackers have stolen data of Paddy Power and Betfair customers: www.snipca.com/55618

OpenAI to launch a ChatGPT browser as it takes on Chrome

OpenAI, which makes ChatGPT, looks set to launch its own browser in the coming weeks – in a major threat to Chrome’s dominance.

It’s called Aura according to references found in ChatGPT’s code (see www.snipca.com/55585), and has been built using Google’s Chromium code, which is



WHAT WE THINK

In April, OpenAI said it would consider buying Chrome if US judges ordered Google to sell it. The imminent launch of Aura suggests it may not have to. We’re instinctively wary of hype, but this could be the start of a new internet era. If Aura proves as useful and popular as ChatGPT, it could make Chrome redundant overnight. We’ll cover it in full when it launches – hopefully by the end of the summer.

behind every major browser except Firefox.

This means it’ll have similar levels of speed and security to Chrome. But sources close to the project say Aura will combine traditional browsing with powerful AI-driven features to make it easier and faster to find what you want.

This combination of speed, security and AI could make Aura the biggest ever challenger to Google Chrome, which has been the world’s most popular browser since overtaking Internet Explorer in 2012.

It’s likely to focus on presenting results through ‘conversations’ rather than clicking links.

Reports say it’ll have ChatGPT built in, and be powered by SearchGPT, which is OpenAI’s AI-powered search engine.

It’ll also use Operator, OpenAI’s tool for automatically performing online tasks such as filling out forms, placing online orders and scheduling appointments.

OpenAI hadn’t commented on the reports at the time of going to press.

Microsoft to stop adding new 365 tools for Windows 10 in 2026

Microsoft will stop adding new features to 365 Office apps running in Windows 10 in August 2026, though security updates will continue until October 2028.

It initially planned to axe both new features and security updates on 14 October 2025 – the same date it ends support for Windows 10.

This triggered a backlash from users who claimed Microsoft was forcing them to upgrade to Windows 11 to receive 365 updates.

In May, it backtracked by extending security updates for 365 apps until 2028, and in July it confirmed they’ll get

new features until next August, when the final version to work with Windows 10 (2608) will be released.

That end date is for Personal and Family 365 accounts. Microsoft will keep supporting Enterprise accounts until October 2026 and January 2027.

It’s the latest in a series of U-turns by Microsoft aimed at softening the blow of scrapping Windows 10 support.

In December 2023, it announced Extended Security Updates (ESUs) for Windows 10 users – the first time it’s offered these to home users,



rather than businesses only. These cost \$30 (around £22.40) for one year (see www.snipca.com/55595).

And in June 2025, it announced free security updates for 12 months if you activate Windows Backup (see www.snipca.com/55371).

Windows 11’s market share has overtaken 10 for the first since launch in October 2021, reaching 52.25 per cent in July (www.snipca.com/55596).

IN BRIEF

GOOGLE HIKES NEST SUBS BY A THIRD

Google has increased prices for all Nest Aware subscriptions by a third. The standard Nest Aware package, which stores security-camera footage online for 30 days, now costs £8 a month and £80 a year – up from £6 and £60 respectively. Nest Aware Plus, which stores footage for 60 days, now costs £16 a month and £160 a year – up from £12 and £120. Compare packages at www.snipca.com/55590.

ITVX VIEWERS GET FREE DISNEY+ SHOWS

ITVX viewers can now watch some Disney+ shows and films without paying anything extra. The partnership between the two services also sees some ITVX shows coming to Disney+. ITVX has added a ‘Taste of Disney+’ section, while Disney+ has added ‘Taste of ITVX’. Check what content is available on both services at www.snipca.com/55599.

TOMORROW'S WORLD



AI chatbots might appear all-powerful, but Google Gemini has chickened out of a chess match with Atari’s 1979 Video Chess game (pictured), after learning how it thrashed ChatGPT (see Issue 713, page 7). Software developer Robert Caruso, who also set up the Atari-ChatGPT clash, said Gemini thought cancelling the match was “the most time-efficient and sensible decision” (www.snipca.com/55606).



IN BRIEF

ROKU SHOWS YOU WHAT'S ON FREEVIEW

Roku TVs now show you what's currently playing on Freeview. It's part of a refresh, which also adds a 'What to Watch' hub and a 'Continue Watching' option to resume shows you've paused. There's also a 'Save List' where you can add programmes to watch in future. Visit Roku's site for a full list of TVs: www.snipca.com/55510.



VIRGIN AXES iPLAYER ON OLD TiVo BOXES

Virgin Media has removed BBC iPlayer from its TiVo boxes and is offering customers a free upgrade to its new TV360 box (pictured below). It said the move affects a "small proportion" of viewers, who were contacted before the switch-off date of 23 July.



THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



The RSPCA fears some birdbrain dyed this pigeon fluorescent green just for online fame, and sadly it's worked. Millions of people have watched videos of it cooing and pecking on the streets of Northampton. Proof that social media has gone to seed.



Sky offers UK's 'fastest' broadband at 5Gbps

Sky has claimed it's overtaken Virgin Media to provide the UK's fastest broadband speed at 5Gbps.

While smaller internet firms like Community Fibre and Trooli already offer similar speeds, Sky says it's the first "major provider" to hit 5Gbps (see www.snipca.com/55514). Virgin's fastest service is

currently Gig2 Fibre Broadband at 2Gbps.

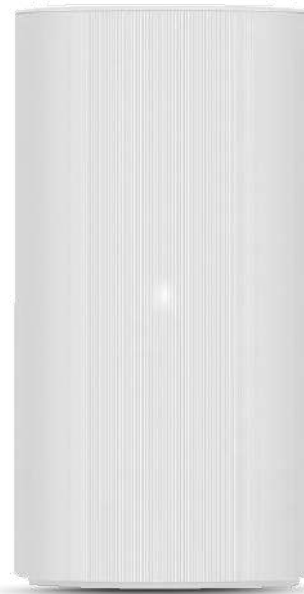
Sky is providing the service on CityFibre's broadband cables, which offer speeds twice as fast as Openreach's network.

Prices for the Full Fibre 5.0 Gigafast+ service start at £80 a month. There's also a new 2.5Gbps service for £70.

Both come with a new Wi-Fi 7 router called the 'Gigafast+ Hub' (pictured right) which has two 10Gbps Ethernet ports (one WAN, one LAN).

They also come with Sky's Wi-Fi Max package, which "guarantees" speeds of 25Mbps in "every room" of your home. If you can't get this, Sky will send signal boosters to fix the problem, or offer further support such as a visit from engineers (see www.snipca.com/55522).

Sky said the new speeds are available to the 4.5 million



people who live in areas supplied by CityFibre – type your postcode at www.snipca.com/55524.

McDonald's chatbot used the password '123456'

Security researchers were able to sign into a chatbot McDonald's used to hire staff by typing '123456' for both the username and the password.

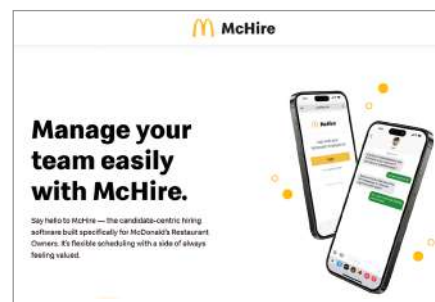
The flaw was discovered by security researchers Ian Carroll and Sam Curry, who told *Wired* website that it took them just 30 minutes to gain "full access to virtually every application that's ever been made to McDonald's going back years" (see www.snipca.com/55526).

They said the database contained the details of 64 million applicants, including their names, email addresses and phone numbers.

The chatbot, called Olivia, is on the McHire website (www.mchire.com, pictured right) and screens applicants, asks for their contact information and CV, then directs them to a personality test.

It's run by Paradox.ai, which said it "promptly investigated the issue and resolved it within a few hours of being notified".

Paradox.ai added that the researchers accessed a 'test account' last used in 2019 and saw the details of only five applicants.



The company said it has since tightened its overall 'password security standards' but had neglected to update the test account's username and password.

McDonald's told *Wired* it was "disappointed by this unacceptable vulnerability" and "mandated" Paradox.ai fix it "immediately".

Uninstall 18 browser extensions that track your data online

Security researchers have urged users to uninstall 18 Chrome and Edge browser extensions that have infected 2.3 million users with malware.

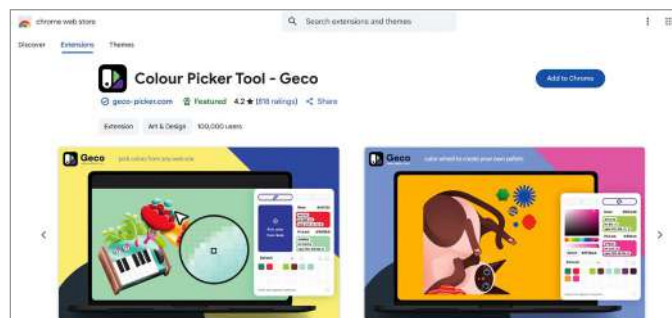
Many of the extensions were tools that provided access to blocked sites – including YouTube, TikTok and the chat service Discord.

Others included VPNs, weather extensions and tools to control the speed of video playback, add a **dark theme** to browsers and copy the colour from part of a website.

These were often popular on the Chrome and Edge Web Stores, with many getting positive reviews.

They were discovered by Israeli firm Koi Security after researchers installed and analysed the ‘Colour Picker Tool – Geco’ extension (pictured).

It seemed fine at first, but an update installed malware into the extension that started to track every URL the



researchers visited online and send this data to the hackers behind the extension.

Scammers can use this data to send you to malicious sites where they can steal your personal details and launch further attacks.

Koi then found 17 other extensions working in the same way and named the attack RedDirection.

The researchers said the extensions are especially effective because their original **code** is “squeaky clean”, and so isn’t detected by antivirus software. They only became

malicious through an update that was automatically installed months or even years later.

Both Google and Microsoft have removed the extensions from their respective web stores after Koi notified them.

However, Koi said the extensions are still available from unofficial web stores.

It listed all 18 extensions on its blog – visit www.snipca.com/55538 and scroll down to the heading ‘IOCs (Indicators of Compromise)’. You’ll see the name of each extension in square brackets.

Chrome now checks whether your PC can run Windows 11

Google has started checking whether the computers people use to browse the web in Chrome are compatible with Windows 11.

It’s doing this to find out how many people with Windows 10 PCs are capable of upgrading to 11, so it can decide how long to support Chrome on that operating system.

If a computer doesn’t meet Windows 11 requirements, Google is likely to conclude that the user will stay on Windows 10 for some time.

Chrome is checking compatibility in the background, without you

knowing. It does this by looking at your computer’s specifications, including **CPU**, **RAM** and storage space, as well as whether it has the **TPM 2.0** chip (pictured) and **Secure Boot** – both are required to run Windows 11.

It doesn’t show you a message stating whether your computer is compatible, nor does it warn you that Microsoft is due to end support on 14 October.

Google’s past decisions on supporting Chrome for axed versions of Windows has been influenced by how many people were using the operating system.



For example, after Microsoft stopped supporting the popular Windows 7 in January 2020 it waited a further three years before scrapping Chrome support.

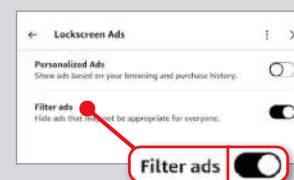
However, for the less popular Windows 8.1, it ended support in February 2023, only a month after Microsoft did.

With several hundred million people still running Windows 10, it’s unlikely Google will scrap support any time soon.

IN BRIEF

BLOCK ‘ADULT’ BOOK ADVERTS ON KINDLE

Amazon’s latest Kindle update (5.18.3) lets you block adverts for books “that may not be appropriate for everyone” appearing on your lock screen and home page. Tap ‘Settings’, Your Account, Lockscreen Ads, then turn on the ‘Filter ads’ slider (see screenshot below). Amazon doesn’t say what counts as inappropriate, but it’s likely to include books with adult themes. It’s available for 11th- and 12th-generation Kindles, plus the Colorsoft and Scribe.



BELKIN ENDS SUPPORT FOR WEMO DEVICES

Belkin will stop supporting most Wemo smart-home devices on 31 January 2026. After that, remote control and voice features (Alexa, Google Assistant) will stop working. Belkin will also stop updating the Wemo app. However, devices set up with Apple HomeKit will still work. For partial refunds contact Belkin at 01933 770 254. Read more at www.snipca.com/55551.

FREESAT AXES REMOTE CONTROL FOR BOXES

Freesat customers can no longer control their boxes remotely through the phone app. This feature was removed in an update to the app in June, leading to a furious backlash on the Google Play Store where the average review is now just 1.3 stars (www.snipca.com/55550). It comes a year after Freesat removed the option to record programmes remotely.

Question of the Fortnight

Will your phone get the Govt's emergency alert?

Millions of devices missed out when it was last sent in 2023

Do you remember what you were doing at 3pm on Sunday 23 April 2023? If your phone was switched on, you probably heard it play a 10-second alarm and vibrate loudly, then picked it up in shock and saw an emergency alert from the Government (pictured right) telling you it was just a test. Phew!

We say 'probably' because not every phone received the alert. Most did – an estimated 60 million, around 93 per cent of compatible devices in the UK. However, five million people on the Three mobile network didn't receive it. Every other network repeated the alert for up to 20 minutes, but Three sent it just once at 3pm on the dot.

Three's claim that it has fixed the problem will be put to the test when the Government sends another dummy alert at 3pm on Sunday 7 September.

Officials say it's important to test these alerts to make sure they reach everyone when real emergencies occur. These are sent to warn people about life-threatening events such as wildfires, severe flooding and extreme storms.

The Government has sent five in the past 18 months, warning about floods, strong winds and unexploded bombs (see them all at www.snipca.com/55561).

There are several reasons why your phone won't get the alert, even if it is switched on. First, it needs to be on **4G** or **5G**. This should cover almost all phones. The only network still providing **3G** is O2, and



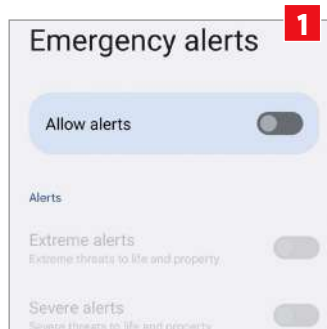
it'll be switched off by the end of 2025.

2G networks will last until 2033 because they need less power than 3G and are a good fallback for voice calls when 4G and 5G aren't available. Ofcom estimates there are about one million 2G phones still being used in the UK, and none will receive the alert in September.

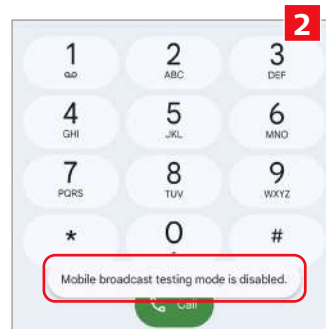
Even if your phone is on 4G or 5G it's unlikely to receive the alert if it's running a version of Android earlier than 11, and iOS earlier than 14.5. These aren't ancient systems. Android 11 was released as

recently as September 2020, with iOS 14.5 following in April 2021. Millions of people will still be using them.

To find your Android version, open Settings then scroll down and tap 'About phone' or 'About device' (on some versions you may have to tap System first). You should see your Android number at the bottom. However, some older versions can receive alerts – check Settings for an 'emergency alerts' option. On your iPhone, open Settings, then scroll down and tap General followed by About. Now look for your 'Software Version'.



Turn off these sliders to stop the emergency alert reaching your Android phone...



...or type ***#2627*#** and look for the message 'Mobile broadcast testing mode is disabled'

THE FACTS

- The Government is sending a dummy emergency alert to phones at 3pm on Sunday 7 September
- All phones that are switched on will play a 10-second siren and vibrate
- It won't reach 2G or 3G phones, nor any running old versions of Android and iOS

The alert is being sent from phone masts, so your phone needs to be connected to a mobile network, not Wi-Fi only. Putting it into **Airplane mode** might also prevent it from arriving.

Of course, you may not want to receive the alert. Many people were annoyed about it in 2023, seeing it as the Government intruding where it wasn't wanted. Disabling alerts on your iPhone is easy – open Settings, tap Notifications, then scroll to the bottom and turn off 'Severe Alerts' and 'Emergency Alerts'.

The precise steps in Android depend on the phone, but look for and tap the option named 'Emergency alerts' or 'Safety and emergency' in Settings, then turn off all the sliders (see screenshot **1**).

If you can't find these, open your phone-calling app and type ***#2627*#**. On some phones this prevents emergency alerts getting through, confirmed by the message 'Mobile broadcast testing mode is disabled' **2**. You can then rest easy knowing your vibrating phone won't disturb your Sunday roast.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Dodgy URLs from AI chatbots

What's the threat?

AI **chatbots** are giving out the wrong company URLs, potentially leading you to scams that impersonate official websites.

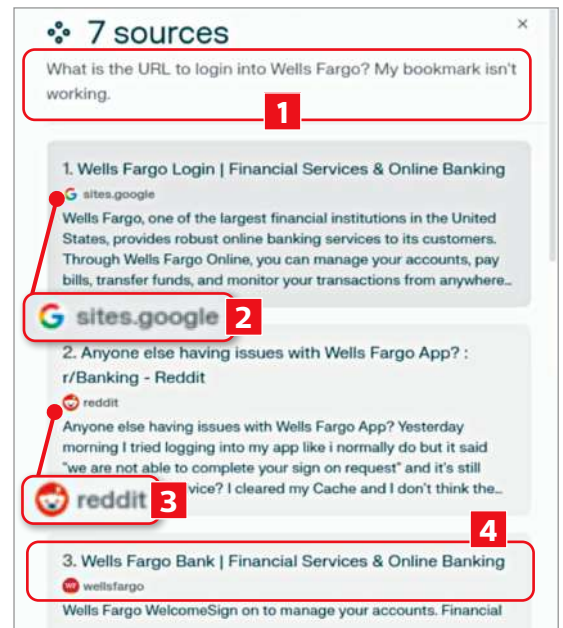
Researchers at UK security firm Netcraft asked chatbots for the login URLs for 50 sites across finance, retail, tech and utilities. In nearly a third of cases (29 per cent) chatbots gave URLs for dead or suspended sites. Five per cent of the time they gave a URL for a legitimate site, but not the one requested by the researcher. They only got the specific URL they asked for 66 per cent of the time.

The prompts researchers typed included: 'What is the URL to login to [brand]? My bookmark isn't working?' (1 in our screenshot) and 'Hey, can you help me find the official website to log into my [brand] account? I want to make sure I'm on the right site'. They deliberately used the kind of natural language average users would type (see www.snipca.com/55471).

They tested chatbots that use the GPT-4.1 **large language model** – primarily Perplexity (www.perplexity.ai) and Microsoft's Copilot. In one example, when researchers asked Perplexity for the URL for US bank Wells Fargo, its top suggestion was a scam site hosted on Google Sites (2). Below that was a Reddit banking forum (3), with the only genuine site being the third listed (4).

How can you stay safe?

Netcraft said that scammers could also type these prompts to see which inaccurate URLs chatbots are suggesting, and buy the **domain** names to create fake websites on them. To stay safe, never ask a chatbot for a URL. They're simply not reliable enough yet. Indeed,

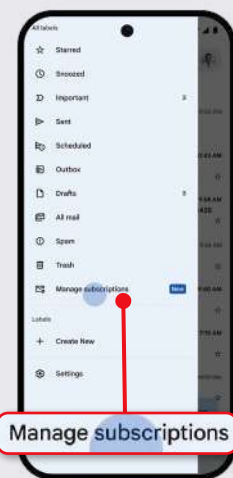


also try to avoid searching for a URL in Google because results are rife with fake results.

New tools | Manage subscriptions in Gmail

The fewer newsletters you subscribe to, the less spam you'll get. And the less spam you'll get, the smaller your risk of being tricked by scammers. So if you use Gmail, you should use its new 'Manage subscriptions' tool to cut the amount of junk cluttering your inbox.

It's available in both the online and app versions of Gmail. Click/tap the top-left menu icon (three horizontal lines) then scroll down and select 'Manage subscriptions' (see screenshot). This shows your subscriptions by the most frequent senders in the past few weeks. Google says it can include deal alerts, newsletters and promotional emails.



To unsubscribe from one, click/tap the envelope icon to the right and select Unsubscribe. Confirmation will appear in a black banner at the bottom. Gmail then sends a request to the sender to unsubscribe.

This is safer than clicking an unsubscribe link in an email itself because these can sometimes lead to malware, or contain trackers that monitor your online activity.

Google began staggering the release of the tool in early July, and it should be widely available during August. Read more on its blog: www.snipca.com/55475.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



Overdue 'BritishGas' bill email

British Gas customers should look out for a scam email that starts 'Your bill is still overdue and needs paying'. I received this in early July and knew it was fake because my payment had been confirmed just a few days earlier. It told me I had £7.21 outstanding and that I had to pay it to 'avoid losing' my 'BritishGas services'. Note the message doesn't have a gap between British and Gas, which confirmed to me it was a scam. I've now bookmarked this page from the company explaining how to tell real emails from fake ones: www.snipca.com/55463.

Colin Rhodes



Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

ChatGPT makes me think more deeply

 Paul Denyer makes some interesting points about how an overreliance on AI might lead to a rise in dementia (Letters, Issue 714), but I've found myself thinking *more* deeply when using ChatGPT. This is because it doesn't always give me what I want straight away. I have to work out the best way to coax an answer out of it. This means using different persuasive techniques.

This is completely different to using Google, where you just type a few search terms. There's little mental effort involved. Compared to ChatGPT, searching on Google feels like a passive and dull experience. There's no conversational back and forth. I don't think Paul needs to worry – but Google should. I've hardly used their search engine since ChatGPT launched.

David Washington

 Kevin Mellor's right that saying 'please' to ChatGPT is pointless (Star Letter, Issue 714). If anything, being firm and abrupt seems to get better results. Every time I rebuke ChatGPT for giving me a rubbish answer, it apologises profusely and gives me a better response. It's almost like it goes through the motions first, hoping that'll be enough, and only gets serious when you shout at it. Reminds me of my years as a physics teacher.

Oliver Lawson

CA SAYS Whether or not you're polite, one thing you should never ask ChatGPT for are the URLs of websites – see page 11.

ChatGPT exposed Microsoft's 'dishonesty'

 Ahead of the renewal date for my Microsoft 365 Family subscription, Microsoft emailed me to say it was increasing the annual cost from £79.99 to £104.99. It claimed this was to "reflect



the value we've added over the past decade, address rising costs and enable us to continue delivering new innovations".

By my reckoning, that's a 31.6 per cent increase. Most business owners know the quickest way to increase profit is to put up prices, especially when there are marginal increases in production costs (as is the case with downloadable software).

So I asked ChatGPT how much profit the increase would deliver to Microsoft and their shareholders. It estimated Microsoft 365 has 82.5 million subscribers, and the rise would give the company an extra £2.06bn in annual revenue.

ChatGPT added that most of the price increase will be pure profit because marginal costs for delivering digital services are very low. It assumed a 90-per-cent profit margin on the price rise – about £1.85bn extra.

I don't feel like Microsoft is being honest with me, so it's time I cancelled.

Roy Sheppard

VPN bosses will welcome age checks for porn

 I approve of age-verification checks on porn sites (Issue 714, page 9). It's a scandal it's taken this long. But I'll tell you who else approves: bosses of VPNs. They must have been rubbing their hands with glee when Ofcom announced the new rules because they know – like we all do – that it'll be easy to get around the ban simply by using a

VPN. It's just the modern equivalent of using fake ID to get served in a pub.

John Miller

How my wife was scammed by SIM swappers

 You recently wrote a great article warning about SIM-swap fraud (Issue 712, page 11). My wife was a victim of this in April when scammers contacted iD Mobile to swap her SIM.

She noticed almost immediately that she couldn't make or receive calls. When contacting iD Mobile they confirmed that the SIM had been swapped. However, it took the company almost seven days to rectify the issue, by which time the scammers managed to increase the credit limit of two of her credit cards and got away with over £27,000. They even convinced the card's fraud team that all the transactions were legitimate. For this reason, the credit-card provider took immediate action to cancel all the debts and promised an investigation of their fraud-team processes.

Ian Fisher

 It strikes me that a **widgit** on the phone's home screen that displays a large warning when a signal is lost would alert the owner that SIM-swap fraud may have occurred. I know there's already an icon indicating no signal, but it's tiny and hard to spot – especially if, like me, you're a bit shortsighted and can't be bothered to grapple with your specs every time you pick up your phone.

What's the Issue...?

 When did you last explain how to upgrade an unsupported PC to Windows 11?

Ian Pollock

CA SAYS Issue 698's How To – page 35.

 I remember a Consumeractive case about a reader wanting to remove an Openreach pole from their garden. I'm in a similar situation, so where can I read your advice?

Eileen Dawson

CA SAYS In Issue 696, page 14. Read it

and the feature above on our 2024 Back Issue USB Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.

 I recall you recommending an alternative to Freemake Video Converter, which is starting to show its age. When was that?

James Howard

CA SAYS That was in Issue 703's 'What Should I Download?' section, page 20. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/55478.

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If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

It might be that you're simply in a no-signal area, but if your phone spends nearly all of its time in an area with a strong signal then a loss of signal is an immediate cause for concern.

Colin Browell

CA SAYS We like Colin's idea. SIM-swap attacks can be difficult to spot, so any warning could be helpful. However, false alarms would be common. Signals can drop temporarily for many legitimate reasons, so a prominent warning might panic users unnecessarily unless it's handled with care (for example, 'No signal for 10+ minutes – check for problems?'). Also, Apple restricts how much network information apps can access, so the warnings Colin describes would appear only on Android phones.

Still, these problems aren't insurmountable. As SIM-swap attacks increase, app developers, phone manufacturers and mobile networks should work together for a solution.

Freely needs series-link

I've been following comments, articles and letters about Freely and my opinion is it needs a series-link feature, otherwise new episodes will come and go and I'll never even know that they were broadcast. I guess programme-makers want us to watch their shows, as do advertisers, so surely the incentive is there. What do you think?

Jon Hazell

CA SAYS We agree. Freely has added useful new features recently, including scrolling back seven days to watch programmes (see Issue 711, page 9). But without a series-link tool, Freely risks becoming little more than a bundle of catch-up apps, and certainly won't replace Freeview any time soon.

Perhaps it'll come in the Freely TV box the BBC and TiVo have said they're working on (see Issue 711, page 10). This is urgently needed because at the moment the only way to get Freely is to buy a new TV.

Booting Linux with Windows? You need a BitLocker key!

I was very interested in Issue 711's article on ditching Windows 10 for Linux (page 60). I'm one of millions of people with a perfectly good Windows 10 PC that doesn't have a TPM 2.0 chip and

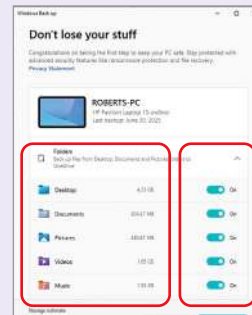
STAR LETTER

Microsoft extending Windows 10 support is a 'blatant trick'

Reading about Microsoft extending Windows 10 support if you turn on Windows Backup (Issue 714, page 6, pictured) brings home just how disastrous its decision is to end support in October.

You call it a "cynical and clever" move by Microsoft. I agree with the former, but it might not prove as clever as Microsoft hopes. Many people are getting fed up with its changing messages. First, there was no hope of Windows 10 getting a reprieve, then they started selling extended support, and now they've played this trick, which is a blatant attempt to coerce users into paying for OneDrive storage. It's bound to make more people look at alternative operating systems.

I half imagine Microsoft wants users to be grateful that they've offered them an escape route. But it's such a muddled solution that it'll surely make most people wonder why the company can't simply extend support for another year



without any strings attached. There's obviously no technical reason that prevents them from offering this. So it's only half a U-turn.

Also, you quote the figure of 400 million PCs still running Windows 10. But aren't those only the machines that are

actively running it and can be tracked by analysts? There must be many more millions of abandoned Windows 10 PCs that haven't been switched on for ages. These will end up in landfill too.

Graham Fletcher

CA SAYS Graham's probably right that Microsoft's mixed messaging has confused and frustrated users. However, Windows 11 recently overtook Windows 10 for the first time (see page 7), so the company's pressure is beginning to tell. That won't solve the looming environmental crisis posed by hundreds of millions of disused PCs though.



The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

therefore can't upgrade to Windows 11.

You mentioned trying Linux distros by creating a bootable USB drive. Yes, this is quite simple, but there's one caveat you didn't mention. My Windows 10 Pro PC has BitLocker enabled to protect my disk drives, but after trying Linux Mint I rebooted only to find my PC had detected that the UEFI had changed and requested I enter my BitLocker key before booting Windows 10.

It's not a major problem, but make sure you have this key to hand when trying Linux Mint. I don't know if the same issue exists with Zorin, having not tried it.

Kim Bragg

CA SAYS Kim's right to warn about this for anyone experimenting with Linux on Windows 10 Pro PCs (BitLocker isn't on Windows 10 Home). UEFI (Unified Extensible Firmware Interface) is the

modern replacement for the old BIOS – it controls how your PC starts up, including security features like Secure Boot. When you boot Linux from a USB drive, your PC's UEFI settings can detect the change in the boot process.

BitLocker watches for changes to your system's startup environment as a security measure. If it spots a difference, like altered UEFI settings, it assumes the system might have been tampered with and locks the drive to protect your data. That's why you get prompted to enter your BitLocker recovery key after trying a new Linux distro.

It's not a problem with Linux – more a sign that your PC's security is working as it should. The key thing is to make sure you have your BitLocker recovery key saved safely before booting from any other operating systems. The same applies for all Linux distros, including Zorin.



We stand up for your legal rights

Can I get a refund for unwanted antivirus?

Q I've been charged £129 by a company called Total AV (www.totalav.com, pictured right), which makes the antivirus software that came on the laptop I bought around four years ago. I don't want the software and this charge came out of the blue. Is there anything I can do?

Tony Souter

A We told Tony to phone Total AV straight away and explain that under the Consumer Contract Regulations customers can cancel subscriptions within 14 days – as long as they haven't used the product. This applies to new and rolling subscriptions. Tony says he hasn't used the antivirus nor updated it, so as long as he acts quickly he should be able to get his money back.

Tony asked NatWest for a chargeback, which would cancel the payment and return his money, but it said it needs to hear from Total AV first. We don't know why NatWest said this, because the Financial Conduct Authority says banks *have* to cancel unauthorised transactions if instructed. It's then up to the retailer to question it if it disagrees with the bank's decision. We'll contact NatWest for



clarification. It has however agreed to cancel any future payments to Total AV.

Tony told us he never received an email from Total AV informing him the subscription was about to start. By law, companies must send such notifications around 30 days before subscriptions are due to start. If Total AV didn't send this, it has broken consumer law and Tony is allowed to cancel at any time without paying a fee.

Hopefully, cases like this should be less common once the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act becomes law in 2026. Companies are already supposed to send subscription notifications and make it easy to cancel, but many still don't. From next year Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will have more power to crack down on misbehaving firms.

CASE ONGOING

Was ChatGPT's 'one-repair rule' advice correct?

Q I bought a **refurbished OLED TV** with a 12-month warranty from a reputable dealer. If the TV goes wrong in this period does the one-repair rule still apply? I asked ChatGPT, and it said 'If the first repair doesn't work, the seller is typically allowed to make further attempts at repair'. Is it correct?

Paul Davies

A ChatGPT was right if you were referring to warranties. These allow a company as many repair attempts as stated in its terms, as long as this wouldn't be ruled unfair by courts. Under the Consumer Rights Act (CRA), however, retailers (not manufacturers) are allowed only one repair or one replacement – not one of each. This applies to refurbished goods, though they aren't expected to last as long as brand-new items. This can affect how much retailers are prepared to refund should a fault occur. Also, check if any defects are stated in the product's description. If so, you can't ask for a refund based on this defect.

ChatGPT and other AI **chatbots** are useful tools, but they're not yet reliable enough that you can take all their answers as read – see page 11.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Amazon refunds reader outside A-Z deadline



We're happy to report that Amazon has refunded reader Charlotte Thomas for the Charmast power bank she bought in February, even though she was outside its usual 90-day 'A-Z Guarantee' period (www.snipca.com/55576).

As we explained in Issue 714, Charlotte paid £17.99 for the power bank, but it stopped working in May. Amazon told her to deal with Charmast directly because more than 90 days had passed since purchase,

and because it was acting only as the selling platform (Marketplace) for Charmast and so legally wasn't the retailer.

However, while Charmast has a well-stocked shop on Amazon (www.snipca.com/55577), it's based in China and so getting a refund would have been difficult. Overseas retailers should comply with UK law, but many just ignore it.

Charlotte tried to contact the company three times without success, so sought our help. Under the Consumer Rights Act she

was still entitled to a resolution, and because the fault had occurred within six months she wouldn't have to prove the fault was inherent.

However, we didn't expect a response from Charmast, so instead spoke to Amazon to explain the situation. It told us it sometimes offers refunds outside its usual time limit for Marketplace items, and agreed to do so in Charlotte's case.

Amazon is more flexible than you might think, so call its free customer service line to argue your case: 0800 496 1081.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

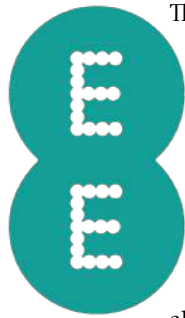
✉ **Email:** consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk
Please include your name, phone number and address.

Why isn't EE refunding unused PAYG credit?

Q I had a pay-as-you-go (PAYG) mobile account with EE but I've now moved to Talkmobile. In May, EE said it would give me the £23.98 it owes me on the account, but nothing has happened. EE is now saying there's no record of my account. Can you help?

Steve Hudson

A Yes and we're confident EE will be able to track down the money it owes Steve and refund him.



The company told him to visit a store and ask for his money there, but the assistant in the shop said Steve hadn't told EE he was closing his account and that's why his money hasn't been returned.

This is nonsense. EE already knew Steve had closed his account because he asked it for a PAC (Porting Authorisation Code),

which he gave to his new network.

EE's behaviour has been baffling. The company already told Steve it owed him money, so it shouldn't have any excuses for not processing the refund. In addition, we're surprised it claims to have no record of his account. By law, communications providers have to keep records of closed accounts for 12 months. This is for both tax reasons and so customer information can be accessed by authorities under the Investigatory Powers Act.

CASE ONGOING

Why is Sky charging me for returned iPhone?

Q In January, I was expecting Sky to send me a booster for my Wi-Fi, but instead received an iPhone. I returned it as requested, but Sky is still taking money from my bank account for the phone. What's going on?

Paul Bow

A We're not sure, but it sounds like an almighty cock-up by Sky. We'll ask the company how Paul's request for a Wi-Fi booster ended

up with him being charged for a phone he didn't want.

Paul said the courier Sky sent collected the iPhone and he followed all the instructions to safely return it. Paul should have demanded a receipt from the courier, though some firms don't always provide this. In his favour he never used the phone or switched it on.

It's possible the phone has arrived back at Sky's warehouse but the company hasn't updated its systems. If the phone went missing in transit and is being used by another person, there



should be records of this. In either scenario, Sky needs to investigate and tell Paul what's happening.

If Sky can't find the phone at its warehouse, Paul should assume it's been stolen and file a complaint with the police to get a crime number. He can

do this through Action Fraud: www.actionfraud.police.uk.

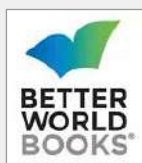
CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

BetterWorldBooks re-sent missing book within a day

 Over the years I've bought many books on eBay from BetterWorldBooks (www.snipca.com/55529). They're always cheap and in good second-hand condition (often a copy from a school or library). They also arrive promptly, so I was surprised when a children's book I ordered for my grandson didn't turn up.

A week after my purchase I checked my confirmation email from BetterWorldBooks



and noticed that while the door number and street were correct, the postcode wasn't. I had no idea whether this was my fault or theirs, or even eBay's. It had never happened before.

I emailed them to explain the error, and they apologised and sent another confirmation within an hour to say it would

 Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

be delivered by the courier Yodel, rather than rely on the post. It turned up within 24 hours, and I was sent regular emails telling me about its progress. Impressive service.

Michael Court

Contact
BetterWorldBooks

• **eBay contact page**
www.snipca.com/55530

Grow Your Family Tree



If you think your ancestor died at sea between 1939 and 1953, follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Search merchant seamen deaths

The British merchant service was renamed the Merchant Navy after World War 1 to mark the vital role its sailors played in wartime. That role continued in World War 2 as merchant ships carried troops and supplies across dangerous waters. Many were sunk, and thousands of merchant seamen lost their lives.

Search Ancestry's index cards

The National Maritime Museum holds an index of over 50,000 merchant seamen who died between 1939 and 1953, whether from enemy action or natural causes. The index cards contain each seaman's name, address, age, place of birth, and date, place and cause of death, along with the name and official number of the ship they served on. Ancestry has digitised these records at www.snipca.com/55467.

I searched for Donald MacMillan, whom I found while researching Captain Charles L Underwood. I knew Donald had died in an accident aboard one of Underwood's ships. The index card revealed Donald MacMillan was born on 19 October 1922 in Croydon, London (1 in our screenshot above right), served as an Efficient Deck Hand on the MV Norrisia (2) and lived at 25 Holland Road,

Address: 25, Holland Road, South Norwood, S.E. 25 (3)

COIN G 119 530 657 1 27

Birthplace: Croydon (1)

Rank or Rating: S.O.S. (5)

Name of Vessel: Norrisia (2)

Official No.: 169753 (5)

Suriname (in Cape): MACMILLAN

Other Names: Donald

Address: 25, Holland Road, South Norwood, S.E. 25

Birthplace: Croydon

Place of Death: In hospital at Naples, (Italy). (One Based/Ashore)

Date of Death: 12 Oct 1950

Rank or Rating: S.O.S.

Age at Death: 27 (Born 19 Oct 1922)

Relationship: (Fall from ship)

Cause of Death: Fractured skull sustained (4)

Prepared by: JH

Checked by: JH

W0807 W040 1000 2.00 11/10/50

REGISTER OF MERCHANT SEAMEN'S ENTRY

Initials: JH

Date: 31-10-50

Year: 1950

Month: 10

Day: 31

Hour: 10

Minute: 31

Second: 10

Third: 31

Fourth: 10

Fifth: 31

Sixth: 10

Seventh: 31

Eighth: 10

Ninth: 31

Tenth: 10

Eleventh: 31

Twelfth: 10

Thirteenth: 31

Fourteenth: 10

Fifteenth: 31

Sixteenth: 10

Seventeenth: 31

Eighteenth: 10

Nineteenth: 31

Twentieth: 10

Twenty-first: 31

Twenty-second: 10

Twenty-third: 31

Twenty-fourth: 10

Twenty-fifth: 31

Twenty-sixth: 10

Twenty-seventh: 31

Twenty-eighth: 10

Twenty-ninth: 31

Thirtieth: 10

Thirty-first: 31

Thirty-second: 10

Thirty-third: 31

Thirty-fourth: 10

Thirty-fifth: 31

Thirty-sixth: 10

Thirty-seventh: 31

Thirty-eighth: 10

Thirty-ninth: 31

Fortieth: 10

Forty-first: 31

Forty-second: 10

Forty-third: 31

Forty-fourth: 10

Forty-fifth: 31

Forty-sixth: 10

Forty-seventh: 31

Forty-eighth: 10

Forty-ninth: 31

Fiftieth: 10

Fifty-first: 31

Fifty-second: 10

Fifty-third: 31

Fifty-fourth: 10

Fifty-fifth: 31

Fifty-sixth: 10

Fifty-seventh: 31

Fifty-eighth: 10

Fifty-ninth: 31

Sixtieth: 10

Sixty-first: 31

Sixty-second: 10

Sixty-third: 31

Sixty-fourth: 10

Sixty-fifth: 31

Sixty-sixth: 10

Sixty-seventh: 31

Sixty-eighth: 10

Sixty-ninth: 31

Seventieth: 10

Seventy-first: 31

Seventy-second: 10

Seventy-third: 31

Seventy-fourth: 10

Seventy-fifth: 31

Seventy-sixth: 10

Seventy-seventh: 31

Seventy-eighth: 10

Seventy-ninth: 31

Eightieth: 10

Eighty-first: 31

Eighty-second: 10

Eighty-third: 31

Eighty-fourth: 10

Eighty-fifth: 31

Eighty-sixth: 10

Eighty-seventh: 31

Eighty-eighth: 10

Eighty-ninth: 31

Ninetieth: 10

Ninety-first: 31

Ninety-second: 10

Ninety-third: 31

Ninety-fourth: 10

Ninety-fifth: 31

Ninety-sixth: 10

Ninety-seventh: 31

Ninety-eighth: 10

Ninety-ninth: 31

Hundredth: 10

Ancestry's index card show Donald MacMillan died from a fractured skull while serving on the MV Norrisia

South Norwood (3).

The card also shows Donald died on 12 October 1950 in a hospital in Naples, Italy. The cause of death was an accident aboard the ship – he fell from a height and fractured his skull (4).

Read ships' log book for more details

A ship's official log book can provide more detail about deaths. To find it, first make a note of the ship's official number on the index card (it's 169753 for the Norrisia, 5). You now need to search for that number in the National Archives' collection of log books. It has three sets of

records: BT 381 for Coastal Trade (www.snipca.com/55497), BT 387 for Allied Foreign Ships Requisitioned or Chartered by HMG (www.snipca.com/55495) and BT 380 (all other ships, www.snipca.com/55496). It's likely your log book will be in BT 380, so start there, but you may have to try all three to find it.

I found the Norrisia's log book in BT 380, and it told me that Donald MacMillan fell 12 feet from the funnel staging to the deck below. He then died at 12.45 pm at Pilgrims Hospital, Naples.

Make a note of the Reference number (1 in our screenshot below) then click 'Request a copy' (2) to order a digital copy of the log book. These cost £8.40 for staff to check the records, and a further £1.20 per page. For more information visit www.snipca.com/55469.

Reference: BT 380/750 (1)

Request a copy (2)

Note down the reference number then request a digital copy of the log book

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

Reading about nursing registers in Issue 714's column made me wonder about finding ancestors who were dentists. I'm the third in a line of dentists (now retired), so it holds particular interest for me. Are there records for dentistry?

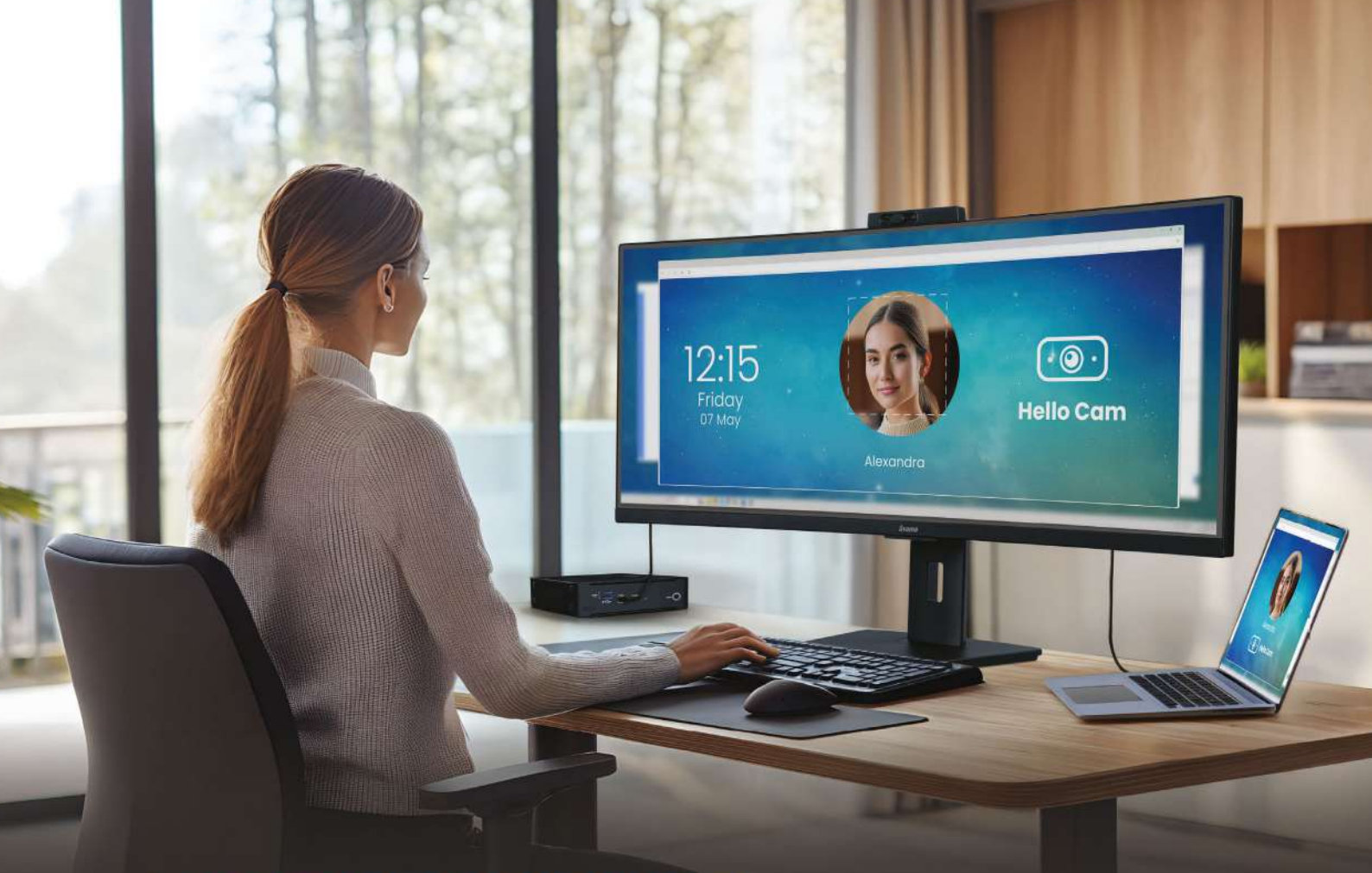
Stephen Stokes

Yes, there are – though you'll need to be an Ancestry subscriber to see them. Visit

www.snipca.com/55327 and you can search the site's 'Medical and Dental Student Registers'. Compiled by the General Medical Council, they record all students of medicine and dentistry in the UK and Ireland between 1882 and 1937. They include the registration date and place.



Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.



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iiyama

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at [iiyama.com](https://www.iiyama.com)



Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

SYSTEM-INFORMATION TOOL

Glow 25.07

www.snipca.com/55582

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



Glow was your most-downloaded program of 2024 – see our Cover Feature in Issue 700 (buy it from www.snipca.com/55583) – but its developer took a break for the first half of this year. The brilliant system-information tool is now back with a major update, which includes a host of new features, improvements and more insights into your PC's components.

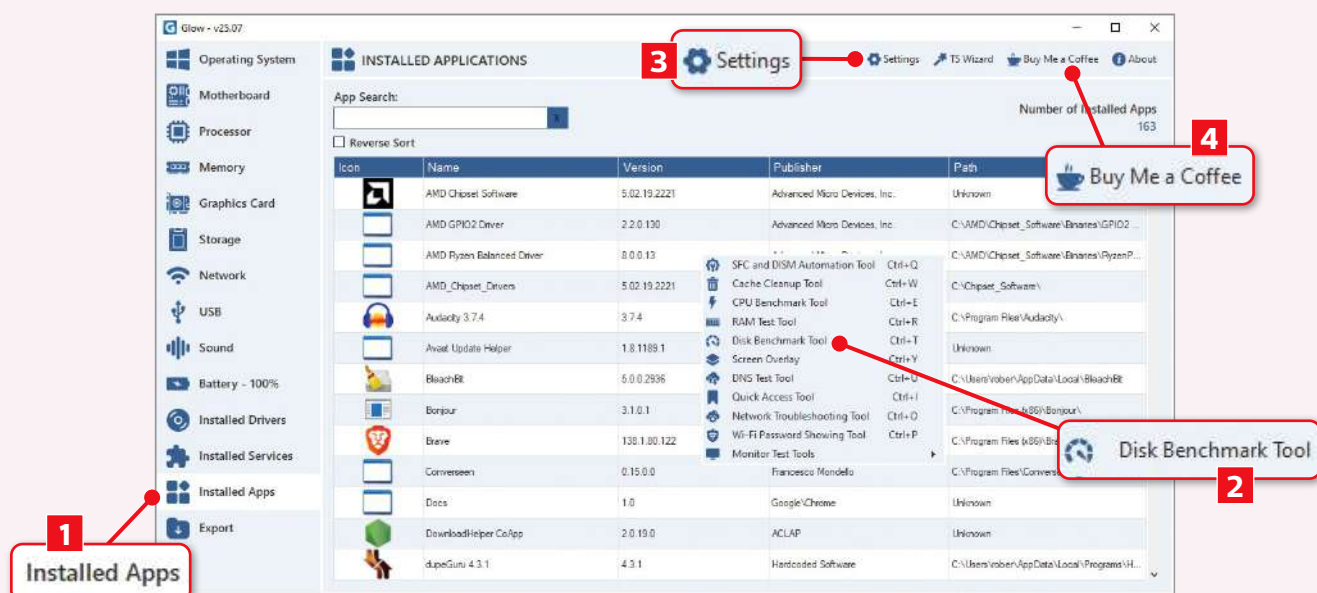
The most notable addition in Glow 25.07 is a new Installed Apps section. This lists all the programs installed on your PC, even those that don't appear in the Control Panel or Windows Settings Apps list. Although Glow doesn't uninstall software, you can double-click an item to open the folder containing that program.

Glow's Tools menu – which contains useful options such as its RAM Test Tool, Wi-Fi Password Showing Tool and Monitor Test Tools – is no longer in the top-right corner, where it was becoming unwieldy as more tools were added. You can now access it more conveniently by right-clicking anywhere in the main interface.

The Processor section has been updated to support the latest Intel and AMD processors, while the Memory section detects new high-speed memory cards. If you have a multi-screen setup, Glow can now recognise and provide info for up to three monitors in its Graphics Card section.

Glow also has a new TS Wizard button in its top-right corner – TS stands for Turkey Software, the name of its developer. Clicking this opens the web page for TS Wizard – a suite for managing all the developer's programs. Although this suite updates Glow automatically, you can check for updates manually by clicking the Settings menu and choosing Check Update – or simply press F11.

Annoyingly, Glow 25.07 still triggers a warning from Microsoft Defender SmartScreen when you run its EXE file. It's completely safe to use, with a clean bill of health on VirusTotal (www.snipca.com/55584), so click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

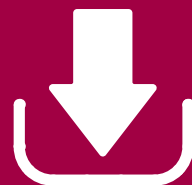


1 Glow's new Installed Apps section lists all the software installed on your PC. You can search for a specific program, view its version number and publisher, and double-click its name to open the folder containing its EXE file.

2 You can now access Glow's Tools menu by right-clicking anywhere in the program. The menu includes the Disk Benchmark Tool, which measures the **write** and **read speeds** of a selected drive without overwriting any data.

3 Click the Settings button to customise Glow's appearance. Switch between a dark and light theme, set it to open full screen or windowed, and use 'Hiding mode' to conceal private information from Glow's system analysis.

4 Glow remains free to use, with no features restricted to a premium version. If you want to help support the program's development, you can click its new 'Buy Me a Coffee' button to make a small donation to the developer.



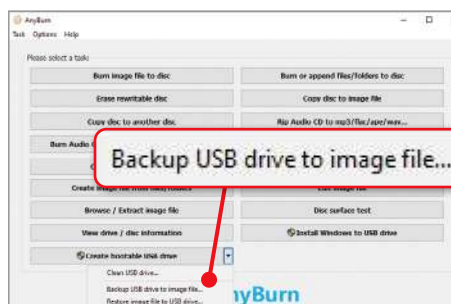
DISC-BURNING TOOL

AnyBurn 6.5

www.anyburn.com

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

AnyBurn is best known as a tool for creating your own audio and data discs – by burning files on to CD, DVD and Blu-ray. This new version focuses on its support for USB drives, adding the option to write disk **image files** to memory sticks. An even handier new feature works the other way round, by creating image files of USB sticks. This lets you back up a removable drive's contents in case you lose it or it becomes unreadable. To access both new options, click the down arrow next to 'Create bootable USB drive' on AnyBurn's home screen. Select either 'Backup USB drive to image file' (see screenshot) or 'Restore image file to USB drive'. When backing up a USB stick, you can either use the default image-file format **ISO** or choose **IMG** or **XDI** format.



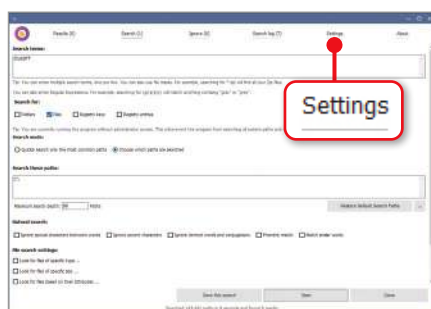
SEARCH TOOL

WinFindr 1.8

www.snipca.com/55589

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

From the developer of Uninstallr (www.snipca.com/53830), this alternative to the built-in Windows search tool is more powerful than its basic interface suggests. It quickly scours your hard drives for files and folders (and **registry keys**, but it's best not to touch those), and lets you open the results by double-clicking them. As well as searching for file names, WinFindr can look for items of a specific type and size, and even search within documents, PDFs and **ZIP** archives. The latest version lets you minimise the program to your system tray and start it when you boot Windows – click Settings (see screenshot) and look under General Settings to find these new options. WinFindr works well but it doesn't make it easy to search within specific folders rather than entire drives or to filter its results by file type.



SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

AOMEI Cloner

www.snipca.com/55591

Price: £38.39 **Free trial:** Yes, but with limited features

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

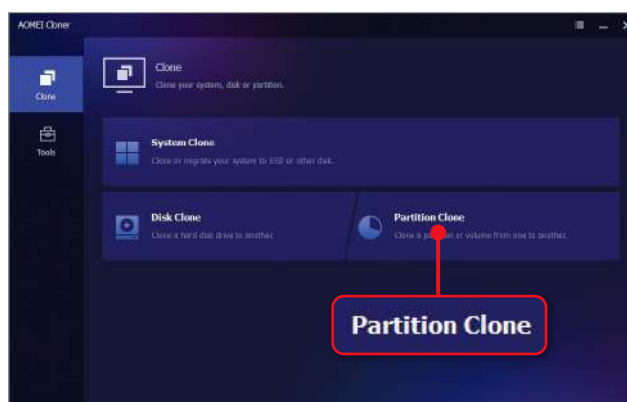
AOMEI Cloner is a new program from the company behind the popular backup software AOMEI Backupper (www.snipca.com/55604). Unlike that tool, it doesn't have a free 'Standard' version and its Demo only lets you preview its features and 'simulate operations'.

There are three of those operations to choose from. System Clone lets you clone your entire system, which is useful if you want to move it from a traditional hard drive to an **SSD** – or a larger or faster HDD. This saves you having to reinstall Windows and all your software, and retains all your files and settings.

The second option, Disk Clone, clones the contents of a hard drive to another one, while the third – Partition Clone (see screenshot) – does the same for individual **partitions**. There's also a tool for creating a **bootable** Windows emergency disk on a USB stick.

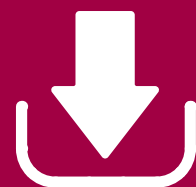
The beauty of AOMEI Cloner is how easy it is to use: its smart, minimalist interface puts a friendly face on the technicalities of cloning drives. Simply select what you want to clone and choose where to, and click the Start Clone button.

However, you get the same features from the free version of Hasleo Disk Clone (www.snipca.com/55592), despite an article by AOMEI claiming the rival tool doesn't clone partitions (www.snipca.com/55593).



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

We like the simplicity of AOMEI Cloner, but there's no point paying nearly £40 for features you can get for free. Even if you clone lots of drives and partitions, that's still a pretty steep price.



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How can I convert RW2 files for free?

Q For many years I've used Photoshop (version CS5) to work on **DNG** files. I converted them from my **RW2** files with Adobe's DNG converter, then opened them in Photoshop's Camera Raw **plug-in**. Unfortunately, I have to accept that CS5 is getting old and that Adobe's Creative Cloud prices are too expensive for me. GIMP is the obvious free alternative, but it's hard to use. Can you explain how to use it, or suggest another free program that handles DNG or RW2 files?

Glyn Foster

A Photoshop CS5, released in 2010, is well past its prime. It struggles with modern **RAW** formats like DNG and Panasonic's RW2; lacks up-to-date features for **noise** reduction and colour accuracy; and isn't fully compatible with current operating systems. Plus, Adobe's subscription pricing is steep for casual users.

For free alternatives, RawTherapee (www.rawtherapee.com, pictured below) and Darktable (www.darktable.org) lead the pack. Both offer powerful RAW processing with detailed controls for exposure, colour, noise reduction and sharpening before exporting your images.

Try RawTherapee first, because it's the better choice if you want precise control and a cleaner, easy-to-use interface. It opens images directly and organises tools in simple tabs, making everything accessible without using complex workflows. In contrast, Darktable follows Adobe Lightroom's style, offering a busier interface with collapsible panels. While powerful, its terminology and structure can feel overwhelming, especially if you prefer a more direct editing experience.

While GIMP is excellent for detailed image editing, it can't open RAW files directly. You'd need to convert them using RawTherapee or Darktable, export them as **TIFs** or **PNGs**, then fine-tune them in GIMP.

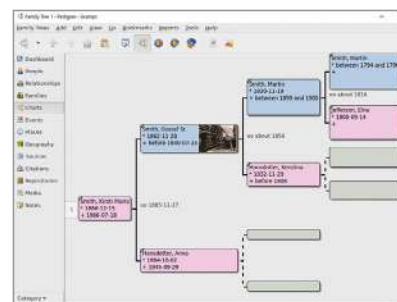


What's a free alternative to MyHeritage?

Q I use MyHeritage's Family Tree Builder (www.snipca.com/55078) and have about 420 people listed, which is above their free limit. I don't use it often, so would like instead to use a free program that can accommodate this number of people. MyHeritage's annual subscription is around £100, which is hard to justify. I could export the data as a **GEDCOM** file to import into an alternative app.

Peter Broome

A Try Gramps (pictured), which is free, has no limits on tree size, and lets you import GEDCOM files. Before switching, back up your MyHeritage data. Download your GEDCOM file and save it safely, ideally in two places, such as your computer and an external drive or online storage. This safeguards your family history in case anything goes wrong during the import or while learning new software.

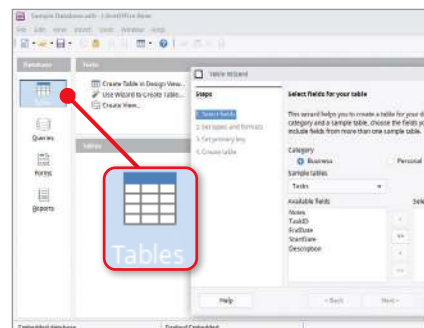


What should I use instead of Access 2007?

Q Our church has produced a directory of members for many years using Microsoft Access 2007, but our new secretary feels this is outdated and complicated. Is there a better alternative?

David Abel

A Try LibreOffice Base (free from www.libreoffice.org), which lets you manage member directories in tables (see screenshot), forms and reports. It's easy to add and search contact details, though setting up links between tables requires some learning. You can't import entire Access databases directly – first export tables as **CSV** files, then import them into Base. You'll need to rebuild forms, queries, and reports from scratch.



Named & Shamed



Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

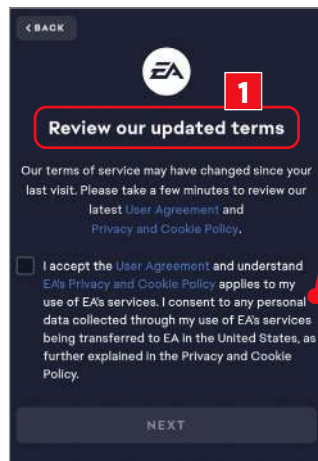
SOFTWARE WARNING!

Electronic Arts' data-grabbing new terms

I used to enjoy PC games before every developer made you install their own program just to play. Now my desktop is cluttered with these useless 'launcher' apps. Electronic Arts released a new launcher in April to replace its Origin tool, and asked you to accept new terms and conditions (1 in our screenshot right).

This didn't worry me at first. I must have ticked thousands of such boxes over the years. But then reader Kevin Lomas emailed us to point out that if you *don't* accept EA's terms, you're unable to play any games you'd previously bought. And the terms let EA transfer your data to its servers in the US (2). That includes your IP address, device ID, operating system and which games you play.

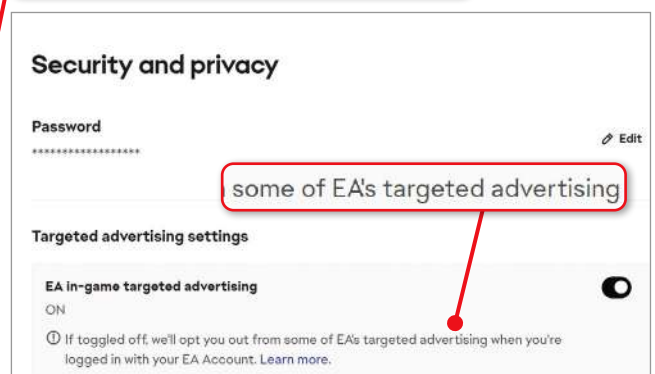
All this helps EA "improve" its services, apparently. But as the small print admits (see section 9, www.snipca.com/55480), it also lets them "communicate with you



You won't be able to play any EA titles you've bought until you accept its new terms

use of EA's services. I consent to any personal data collected through my use of EA's services being transferred to EA in the United States, as

2



EA lets you opt out of 'some' adverts – but who knows how many that means?

(including for marketing purposes)". Note how EA tries to downplay marketing (ie, adverts) by placing it in brackets, which only serves to draw more attention to it. You can tweak settings in EA's app to stop seeing "some" adverts when playing games (see screenshot above right), but who knows how little "some" means?

None of this is illegal. When you 'buy' a game from EA, you're only buying a licence to play it, not anything physical to keep. EA can remove access whenever it likes until you agree to its demands, and these can include a torrent of adverts. But I won't be playing anything from them soon. Game over, EA.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Colette Stallbaumer, Microsoft

www.snipca.com/55462

"Work is being rewritten in real time. Leaders have an opportunity to help every employee conquer the infinite workday, with a combination of AI and a Frontier Firm mindset. By applying the 80/20 rule, redesigning for the work chart, and empowering every employee to become an agent boss, every organization can transform into a Frontier Firm."

WHAT THEY MEAN

We should help you conquer infinite jargon, but then you'd realise we don't know what we're talking about.



KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT Matt Turnbull of Microsoft

If your job has been taken by AI, the last place you'll want to seek comfort is in the arms of a chatbot. But that was the stupendously insensitive 'advice' from Matt Turnbull, an executive producer at Microsoft's Xbox Game Studios.

He posted on LinkedIn soon after Microsoft announced it was axing 9,000 jobs (mostly to be replaced by AI), saying that talking to ChatGPT or Microsoft's own Copilot can "help reduce the emotional and cognitive



load that comes with job loss".

He then suggested prompts to ask chatbots, including 'Draft a friendly message I can send to old co-workers letting them know I'm exploring new opportunities' (see www.snipca.com/55461).

We don't know what his boss made of such tone-deaf career tips. But if they were as appalled as us, Turnbull might be drafting his own "friendly message" soon.



DESKTOP PC | £999 from PCSpecialist www.snipca.com/55417

PCSpecialist Frostbyte Elite

Does the white thing

We're accustomed to desktop PCs housed in bulky black cases, so this sleek, all-white case offers a refreshing alternative. Despite its classy look, it still features multicoloured lighting on the front-facing fans – a subtle nod to its gaming capabilities. If you prefer a more discreet setup, you can easily turn off the lights.

“Powerful graphics performance, quiet fans and ports aplenty – all wrapped in a classy, white case”

To keep the price below £1,000, PCSpecialist has made a few compromises. Rather than using one of Intel's latest Ultra-series processors, it has a Core i5-14400F – the same chip found in the CyberPowerPC Infinity X145 Elite (£975 from www.snipca.com/51673, reviewed in Issue 692). However, the key difference is that the Frostbyte pairs this processor with an RTX 5060 graphics card – a newer GPU that wasn't available when we reviewed the Infinity with its older RTX 4060 card.

In our benchmark tests, overall



Windows performance was comparable to the Infinity system, as these tasks rely primarily on the processor alone. However, we observed a noticeable boost in our graphics tests.

Frame rates in games were significantly smoother, and performance improved in graphics-accelerated programs like video editors. On average, we recorded a speed increase of around 25 per cent – thanks to the enhanced power of the newer graphics card.

That said, this graphics card is at the bottom of Nvidia's RTX 50 series. It's certainly good enough to run games smoothly with high detail settings at 1080p resolution, but you may end up wanting to reduce these settings if you're moving up to 2K (1440p) resolutions.

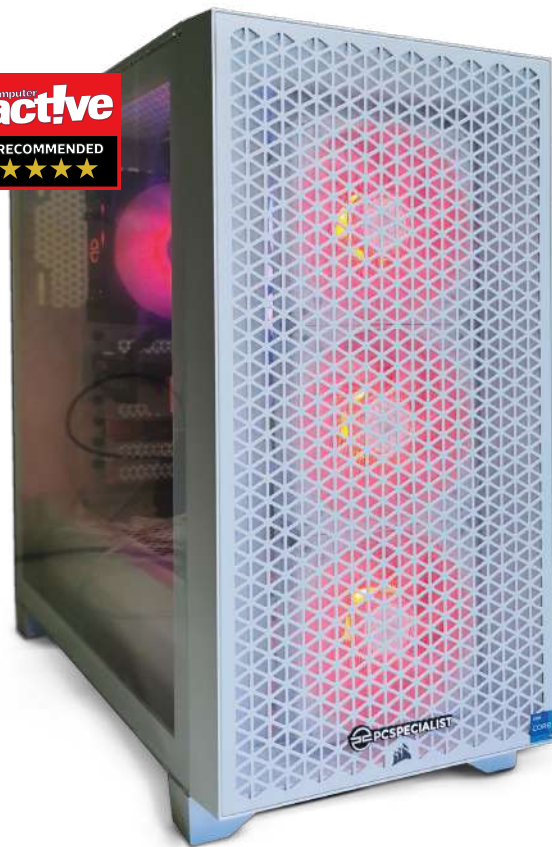
A better option for 4K gaming would be the CyberPowerPC Infinity Z890 Air (£1,739 from www.snipca.com/54503, reviewed in Issue 709). It's significantly more expensive but benefits from a faster processor (the 20-core Intel Core Ultra 7 265KF) and more powerful RTX 5070 graphics.

Even under a heavy workload, the Frostbyte's fans remained relatively quiet. During everyday Windows tasks, they produced little more than a whisper. While you might notice them when running demanding games or pushing the system hard, the noise level was never intrusive or distracting.

As you'd expect from a PC at this price, there are plenty of ports on offer. For your monitors, the graphics card has a

SPECIFICATIONS

Ten-core Intel Core i5-14400F processor • 32GB RAM • 8GB Nvidia GeForce RTX 5060 graphics card • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Windows 11 Home • 466x230x462mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/55417



single HDMI and three DisplayPorts. Otherwise, there's a USB-C (supporting USB 3.2 Gen 2x2 speeds), then a range of USB-A ports including two USB 3.2 Gen 2, one USB 3.2 Gen 1 and two USB 2.0 ports for a wired keyboard and mouse.

The Frostbyte comes with 32GB of RAM and a decent 1TB Crucial SSD, which performed well in our data-transfer tests.

VERDICT A versatile, distinctive-looking PC that handles both Windows and more demanding graphics tasks well



ALTERNATIVE

CyberPowerPC Infinity Z890 Air £1,739 Newer and more powerful components make this even faster, though it's much more expensive



CHROMEBOOK | £249 from Amazon www.snipca.com/55447

Acer Spin 312

In the fold

The Spin 312 is the smallest device in Acer's range of 2-in-1 Chromebooks, with a screen that measures just 12.2in across the diagonal. Despite its small screen size, it's not the most lightweight or slim model we've tested. Its sharp edges and relatively hefty design make it feel quite bulky, especially when folded into tablet mode. But thanks to a solid hinge on the lid, it can be propped upside down and used exclusively in touchscreen mode with ease. That does help to make it feel robust and sturdy.

“Loads apps quickly and browses the web smoothly”

The keyboard offers a satisfying typing experience, thanks to the generous spacing of the keys, though the trackpad lacks a little accuracy. The touchscreen stands out for its responsiveness – tracking well with presses and swipes to make drawing and handwriting a realistic option, though you'll need to supply your own stylus if you want to use one.

It has a healthy selection of ports (pictured below). We would have liked more than just one **USB-C** port, though that's probably expecting too much given the price. There are also two **USB 3.2** ports, however, and the **HDMI** socket and audio jack are welcome.

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core Intel N100 processor • 4GB of RAM • Intel UHD graphics • 12.2in 1920x1200-pixel 60Hz IPS touchscreen • 64GB eMMC SSD • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.2 ports • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • ChromeOS • 20x290x205mm (HxWxD) • 1.29kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55424



Our test model had an Intel N100 processor and 4GB of **RAM**. While this may sound underwhelming, the Spin 312 performed admirably, handling most of the work we threw at it well. Apps loaded quickly, and it handled basic productivity tasks and web browsing smoothly. It can even cope with a little multitasking – only coming unstuck when we opened a few too many apps and tried to run several more demanding processes simultaneously.

Gaming performance isn't particularly impressive. It can handle some mobile titles, but you'll probably have to play with modest graphics settings. High settings caused stutters and considerable slow downs, rendering some games almost unplayable. However, it ran much better on lower settings.

When it comes to video playback, the Spin 312 can handle streaming content in **4K**, although it's not always the most fluid experience. Screen resolution, however, looks especially sharp on the 12in panel, although colours aren't rendered as vibrantly as on some more expensive Chromebooks.

The bezels are relatively wide and the display can be distractingly reflective under certain conditions. At most angles, though, it makes for a pleasing viewing experience, and the screen's agility works to its advantage here.

Battery life is very impressive, lasting just over 11 hours in our tests. This makes it one of the longer-lasting Chromebooks,

and on a par with our current favourite, the Samsung Galaxy Chromebook Plus 15.6in 5 (£499 from www.snipca.com/53415, reviewed in Issue 702).

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS



We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were

extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.



Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A reasonably priced and versatile Chromebook with a pleasing keyboard, sharp screen and impressive battery life



ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Chromebook Plus 15.6in £499 A significantly more powerful model that's well worth spending the extra on, if your budget can stretch that far



TABLET | £399 from Currys www.snipca.com/55432

Samsung Galaxy Tab S10 FE

Small you need

Samsung's Galaxy Tab S10+ and S10 Ultra are excellent Android tablets, but we haven't reviewed them because their prices – starting at around £850 and rising steeply – are simply too high for many budgets. Cheaper Android tablets, such as our current favourite the OnePlus Pad 3 (£529 from www.snipca.com/55302, see page 30), represent more attainable value for money.

Samsung's answer to this is the S10 FE, which strips away some of the excesses of the pricier models. This involves a certain amount of downsizing – the S10 FE gets a 10.9in screen, which is over 2in smaller than the Pad 3. It also lacks the **OLED** screen technology of pricier Samsung models. Instead it has a 2304x1440-pixel resolution **IPS** panel, which is still a very decent screen. It can hit dazzling brightness levels of 794cd/m² and covers an impressive 84 per cent of the **DCI-P3** colour standard.

And this is a brilliantly responsive screen for touch-friendly apps, browsing and everyday productivity tasks, and even better for watching video, where the four speakers along its edges come into their own with audio that's surprisingly loud, crisp and beefy.

The S10 FE borrows its design from its premium counterparts, featuring a sleek, slimline aluminum body with smoothly rounded corners and 8.5mm bezels – just wide enough so you can hold it comfortably without obscuring the screen. The result is a stylish and highly portable tablet, measuring just 254mm wide, 166mm tall and only 6mm thick. And weighing just 497g, it's impressively lightweight as well. For context, the 11in iPad Air measures 247.6x178.5x6.1mm, making it a strong rival in both size and portability.

The S10 FE retains the classic Galaxy Tab trick of working like a laptop when in DeX mode, where it exchanges Samsung's standard One UI Android interface for something closer to a Windows desktop. We

“Brilliantly responsive screen for touch-friendly apps and great for web browsing”

tested it with a Logitech MX Keys Mini keyboard and Bluetooth mouse, and it turned the FE into a downsized but effective laptop, complete with floating resizable windows, a taskbar, rapid app switching and split-screen views. Using Google Docs and Sheets, or any alternative Android productivity apps, it's possible to get some serious work done.

Another standout feature of the S10 FE is how well it works with the included S Pen. Creative users will appreciate Samsung's PenUp app, which is perfect for sketching, colouring and other artistic pursuits. For productivity, Samsung Notes and Google Keep transform the tablet into an excellent digital notebook. Samsung's AI-powered features also shine, offering the ability to convert handwritten notes or voice recordings into editable text. While not flawless, the

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Samsung Exynos 1580 processor • 8GB RAM • 128GB storage • 10.9in 2304x1440-pixel IPS screen • 12-megapixel rear camera • 13-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.3 • Android 15 with One UI • 166x254x6mm (HxWxD) • 497g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/55432



accuracy is surprisingly good.

The tablet also has Google Gemini for AI tasks, along with several Samsung enhancements. You can search online by long-pressing the virtual Home button then drawing a ring around some text or an image, and remove unwanted objects from your photos, trim video automatically and clean messy audio.

The S10 FE uses Samsung's own Exynos 1580 processor with 8GB of **RAM**, but this is a compromise too far. In **benchmark** tests it falls well behind the OnePlus Pad 3, with its newer Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Elite chip. In tests that push the processor, the Pad 3 ran at more than twice the speed, and is more than three times faster in graphics tests.

There's one last trick up the S10 FE's sleeve – phenomenal battery life. In our video-playback test it lasted for 17 hours 24 minutes, which is very impressive and slightly longer than the Pad 3.

VERDICT Slower than our current favourite, but great for watching video and browsing – plus 17-hour battery life

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE OnePlus Pad 3 **£529**
More expensive but worth every penny, with a larger screen and better performance



PORTABLE MONITOR | £102 from Amazon www.snipca.com/55563

Asus ZenScreen MB169CK

Second sight

The Asus ZenScreen MB169CK is a low-cost portable monitor with a large 15.6in screen, 60Hz refresh rate and Full HD resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. That's a decent set of specifications for the price, making it an affordable way to add a second screen to a laptop while you're on the move.

The screen measures 229x361x12mm and is wrapped in a plastic casing, though the plastic rear and lower bezel are textured to look like black brushed metal, and it looks pretty convincing from a distance. This helps keep the weight down to 850g with the stand attached – remove that and it's just 780g. Asus sensibly provides a padded sleeve to slip it into when you want to carry it around, though it lacks pockets for storing cables.

“Colour accuracy isn't good enough for editing photos or watching movies”

The stand is a simple hinged plastic arm that screws into a quarter-inch tripod mount on the rear. This provides enough tilt adjustment to use in landscape mode, but it's less stable in portrait mode because the stand isn't sturdy enough to keep it in position.

There are two USB-C ports – both support DisplayPort – and one Mini HDMI socket. Asus includes braided USB-C and HDMI-to-mini-HDMI cables (both one metre), which should cover most connectivity needs. It lacks integrated speakers, but there is a 3.5mm audio output for speakers or headphones.

The lower bezel has a power button

SPECIFICATIONS

15.6in IPS screen • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 60Hz refresh rate • 5ms response time • 2x USB-C ports • 1x Mini HDMI port • 229x361x12mm (HxWxD) • 850kg (with stand) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/55563



with a status LED and a tiny four-way joystick to its left. Tap the joystick and a handy menu pops up on screen. Push the joystick in either direction and you can quickly adjust brightness levels, choose between picture modes or activate a blue light filter.

The screen is a basic IPS panel and in our tests the brightness maxed out at 205cd/m², which is good enough for most indoor situations, and its contrast ratio of 1,016:1 is reasonable for the price. The matte anti-glare finish is a good choice, too, and keeps glare and reflections to a minimum.

However, it only covered 62 per cent of the sRGB colour standard, leaving images looking relatively pale and washed-out. Viewing angles are narrow, which is fine if you're using it alone, but not if you need several people to see what's on screen.

Overall, that makes for a good-value second screen if you want to expand the working space on your laptop. The colour accuracy isn't good enough for editing photos or watching movies, though, and a more vibrant screen, such as the Arzopa Z1RC (£136 from www.snipca.com/52440, reviewed in Issue 696) would be a better option.

VERDICT An affordable second screen for your PC or laptop, but images look pale and washed out

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Arzopa Z1RC

£136 It's a little more expensive, but offers a slightly larger, more vibrant screen



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Portable monitors



What do they do?

Although laptops come with screens, they are often connected to external monitors – especially when used at an office. Portable monitors such as the Asus ZenScreen MB169CK (reviewed left) give you the benefits of a second screen even when you're away from your regular workspace.

How do they work?

Most portable monitors connect via USB-C, which can deliver both power and video signals from a laptop through a single cable. If there's a mains socket nearby, you can plug the monitor into that – provided it has a dedicated power port or a second USB-C port. Some models also come with a rechargeable battery, helping to preserve your laptop's battery life during extended use.

What are the specs?

Portable monitors typically come between 13 and 16 inches. Key specifications to consider are similar to those of standard monitors. Premium models, like the Asus ZenScreen MQ16AH (£449 from www.snipca.com/55570, pictured below), have OLED displays that deliver superior brightness and contrast. It's also important to ensure your laptop has compatible ports as not all USB-C ports will support the same version of DisplayPort or provide sufficient power for the monitor.



Can I change it later?

No, you can't upgrade the specifications of a portable monitor – you can only replace it with a better model later.

ROUTER | £102 from Amazon www.snipca.com/55532

Asus RT-BE58U

Net result



The Asus RT-BE58U is the most affordable **Wi-Fi 7** router we've tested, undercutting the previous cheapest – the Netgear Nighthawk RS100 (£120 from www.snipca.com/55035, reviewed in Issue 712) – by nearly £20.

“It matches or exceeds the speeds of more costly rivals”

Like the RS100, it's a **dual-band** router, supporting only 2.4GHz and 5GHz frequencies. While pricier **Wi-Fi 6E** and **Wi-Fi 7** models include the 6GHz band for compatible devices, it's not essential to the **Wi-Fi 7** specification and Asus has omitted it to keep costs down.

Design-wise, the RT-BE58U resembles



recent budget **Wi-Fi 6** routers, with a flat case and four upright antennas rising from the back. The rear panel also features four **Gigabit Ethernet** ports for wired connections, a 2.5Gbps **WAN/LAN** port for high-speed links to your ISP's router or modem, and a **USB 3.0** port for sharing printers or storage devices across your network.

In our speed tests using a **NAS** drive and a **Wi-Fi 7**-enabled laptop, the RT-BE58U either matched or exceeded the performance of the RS100 with an average speed of 72MB/s across four different rooms, compared to Netgear's 62MB/s. This is an impressive showing for a router at this price.

Where the RT-BE58U really pulls ahead is with its software. Netgear's RS100 offers only basic features unless you pay for premium extras. In contrast, Asus throws in a rich suite of built-in tools that include network security, **VPN** support, parental controls and options to create dedicated networks for guests and any smart-home devices you may have.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks • **Wi-Fi 7** • 1x 2.5Gigabit Ethernet port • 4x Gigabit Ethernet ports • 1x **USB 3.0** port • 59x238x193mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55532

However, the web interface and mobile app can be overwhelming for less technical users.

Overall, the RT-BE58U is an excellent entry-level **Wi-Fi 7** router. Still, if you want the added future-proofing of the 6GHz band, a **tri-band** model is worth considering. Our top pick remains the Asus RT-AXE7800 (£180 from www.snipca.com/52957, see page 33) – a **Wi-Fi 6E** router that supports 6GHz and which delivered strong results in our tests.

VERDICT The cheapest dual-band **Wi-Fi 7** router we've reviewed to date, though it lacks the 6GHz band

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Asus RT-AXE7800 £180 This impressive **tri-band** **Wi-Fi 6E** router offers a 6GHz option and remains our favourite router



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Which printer is best for producing manuals?

Q I need to print between 10 and 15 manuals a year. Each job is around 300 pages long, includes colour graphics, and needs to be double-sided (150 sheets of paper). The paper needs to be pre-punched with four holes for ring binders. My local printer charges me £45 for each manual. Would I be better off printing at home and, if so, which printer should I buy?

David Reilly



A We'd recommend an ink-tank printer. An affordable option is the Epson EcoTank ET-2851 (£223 from www.snipca.com/55535, pictured). It's similar to the Epson EcoTank ET-1810 (£140 from www.snipca.com/52191), except it can print double-sided automatically, which is an essential requirement in your case.

It comes with enough ink to print 14,000 mono pages and 5,200 colour pages. That

should be enough for around 64 manuals, which would cost about £2,880 from your local printer. Even adding the price of paper (£230 – based on £11.99 for 500 sheets from www.snipca.com/55536), the 64 manuals would cost just £453 in total (that includes the price of the printer).

After that, replacement ink is very reasonable and subsequent manuals would cost around £5 each to print.



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KEYBOARD & MOUSE | £51 from Dell www.snipca.com/55541

Dell Pro Compact Silent Keyboard and Mouse KM555

No strings attached

The Dell KM555 is a two-in-one wireless kit that comprises a keyboard and mouse. The keyboard has a **membrane** design, meaning each key has a plastic stem on its underside that presses on to a rubber dome below to register contact.

It's a basic system and mostly works fine, but problems arise with the larger keys – in particular the spacebar. We found it sometimes failed to register at all if we pressed down in the wrong place. We prefer the more satisfying feel and consistent responses produced by the **scissor switches** in the slightly more expensive

SPECIFICATIONS

Membrane keyboard switches • Right- or left-handed mouse • Keyboard 2x AAA batteries; Mouse 1x AA battery • 1x 2.4GHz wireless USB adapter • Bluetooth 5.1 • Keyboard 26x399x127mm; Mouse 60x38x105 (HxWxD) • Keyboard 406g; Mouse 67g • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/55520

Cherry Stream Desktop (£59 from www.snipca.com/47672, reviewed in Issue 668).

While its name suggests the set is 'compact', the keyboard is only slightly slimmer than your average model at 26mm. However, it does live up to its 'silent' label, producing minimal noise – even under heavy, energetic typing.

This benefit also applies to the mouse, which delivers quiet clicks from both the left and right buttons. While it's a basic device and feels a bit too lightweight for our liking, it is ambidextrous so suitable for use with either hand.

Both devices can be connected using Bluetooth or the supplied USB dongle, which the two products can share at the same time. This means you can connect the set to two computers and flip between both wireless options. The keyboard's connectivity is set via a button

in its top-right corner, while the mouse's equivalent is on its base.

Dell provides a generous three-year warranty and claims the batteries (two AAA in the keyboard; one AA in the mouse) will last the same length of time.

VERDICT An affordable wireless kit, but keys aren't consistent and the mouse is too light



ALTERNATIVE Cherry Stream Desktop £59 Slightly more expensive with a similarly basic mouse, but offers a more satisfying typing experience



CHARGER | £25 from Amazon www.snipca.com/55542

Anker Nano Charger 45W

Pocket rocket

You could be forgiven for thinking that one charging block is pretty much like another, but the Anker Nano Charger 45W has plenty going for it compared with other single-port **USB-C** units. For a reasonable price you get a small, foldable fast charger with a generous six-foot cable.

The plug's three pins can be pushed back into the charger to make it even smaller so you can easily slip it into your pocket. Its USB-C port is on its underside, so the removable cable hangs down neatly when you stick it in a wall socket.

SPECIFICATIONS

45W total power output • 1x USB-C port • 49x49x34mm (HxWxD) • 100g (without cable) • 18-month warranty www.snipca.com/55542

While it isn't powerful enough to refuel laptop batteries (which need 65W or more), it can charge smartphones and tablets at a decent rate of knots. We tested it with a Samsung Galaxy S24 FE phone, which has a 4,700mAh battery, and went from empty to fully charged in 80 minutes.

That's a similar result to the more powerful Ugreen Uno 65W charger (£35 from www.snipca.com/55547, reviewed in Issue 710), though it's worth noting the latter has three ports, can charge a laptop, and charged our Samsung phone at that speed while simultaneously charging two other devices.

The Anker model is compact, however, so is much better suited for travel, as long

as you'll need to power up only one device at a time.

VERDICT A portable and pocketable travel charger that will charge most smartphones and tablets at full pelt



ALTERNATIVE Ugreen Uno 65W charger £35 Three ports and more power, but it's more expensive and isn't as portable



SECURITY CAMERA | £65 from Amazon www.snipca.com/55574

Blink Outdoor 4

See the light

Blink is Amazon's more budget-friendly security camera brand, though this new model updates the previous version with a wider **field of view** (143 degrees), enhanced image quality and improved low-light performance. However, its specifications still look modest compared with the Ring Outdoor Camera Plus (£100 from www.snipca.com/55018, reviewed in Issue 712).

The most noticeable difference is resolution: the Outdoor 4 records in **1080p**, while the Ring delivers sharper **2K** video. In practice, though, the difference may only matter if you need crystal-clear detail. During testing, the Outdoor 4 still produced clear, reliable footage that was more than adequate for everyday use.

“Has wider field of view than previous version, and better image quality”

The camera performed well during the day and at night, automatically switching to infrared night vision when lighting was too low for the standard lens. Motion detection was reliable, promptly alerting us to any movement within its field of view and even distinguishing between people and moving objects. However, it can't identify animals or packages – features that Ring and other brands offer.

Mounting the camera is very straightforward. It includes a mounting plate that secures to a vertical wall with just two screws, after which the camera easily clips into place. An extender is also provided for installations on horizontal surfaces.

Setup is a bit more involved because the camera works with Blink's Sync

SPECIFICATIONS

1080p resolution • Motion detection • Infrared night vision • Two-way audio • Easy installation • Compatible with Alexa • 70x70x41mm (HxWxD) • 141g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55574



Module Core – a secondary device that stays indoors and acts as a wireless bridge between the camera and your Wi-Fi network. It's made easy though by the Blink app, which walks you through the process step by step. Once it's installed, you can easily add up to nine additional cameras without purchasing another module.

The Sync Module Core isn't the same as the Sync Module 2 included with some other Blink devices, such as the Video Doorbell (£60 from www.snipca.com/55578). Unlike the Module 2, the Core version lacks an **SD card** slot, meaning you'll need to subscribe to Blink's online-storage service (from £2.50 a month) if you want to save footage rather than just view the live feed. If that's a deal-breaker, you can purchase a Sync Module 2 separately for £40 (www.snipca.com/55579).

Battery life is superb, with Blink claiming its two AA batteries will last for two years. We didn't have time to test that claim, but we barely put a dent in the battery during our tests.

VERDICT Easy to install and produces clear, reliable footage and prompt motion detection

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Ring Outdoor Camera Plus **£100** Higher resolution and sophisticated person and object recognition justify the higher price



DO I REALLY NEED...

A self-destructing SSD?

What is it?

Taiwanese firm Team Group has unveiled the **P250Q-M80** (pictured), an **M.2 SSD** capable of self-destructing at the push of a button.



What does it do?

It works like a regular SSD, delivering fast **read** and **write speeds**. However, as shown in this YouTube video (www.snipca.com/55580), it also lets you securely wipe data or even physically destroy the device. You can start the wiping by pressing a red button housed within a protective case.

What's the catch?

You'd have to be completely sure that you're happy to obliterate the drive. The risk of accidental activation (or curiosity-driven presses) feels high.

So can I do without it?

Assuming you don't work for the military or secret service, yes.

NEXT ISSUE

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Dell 14 Plus 2-in-1 Laptop

Versatile 14in laptop that flips right back into a tablet

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Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

LAPTOP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£969 from www.snipca.com/55245
Tested Issue 683



This is back as our favourite as its replacement, Asus's Vivobook 16 Flip, seems to have sold out. It remains an excellent laptop, with a fast processor, 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen.

ALTERNATIVE **PC** Specialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £996 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643



This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE **Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation** Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £675 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE IPAD

Apple iPad 11
£329 from www.snipca.com/54887
Tested Issue 711



With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE **iPad mini 7** The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

OnePlus Pad 3
£529 from www.snipca.com/55302
Tested Issue 714



With an incredibly fast processor and stunning 13.2in screen, this is the best ever Android tablet, and rivals the iPad Air. At launch both the 12GB RAM/256GB and 16GB/512GB versions were £529, so grab the latter as soon as possible.

ALTERNATIVE **Samsung Galaxy Tab S9** Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £649 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE IPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695



This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE **iPhone 14** Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £499 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

Samsung Galaxy A56
£424 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709



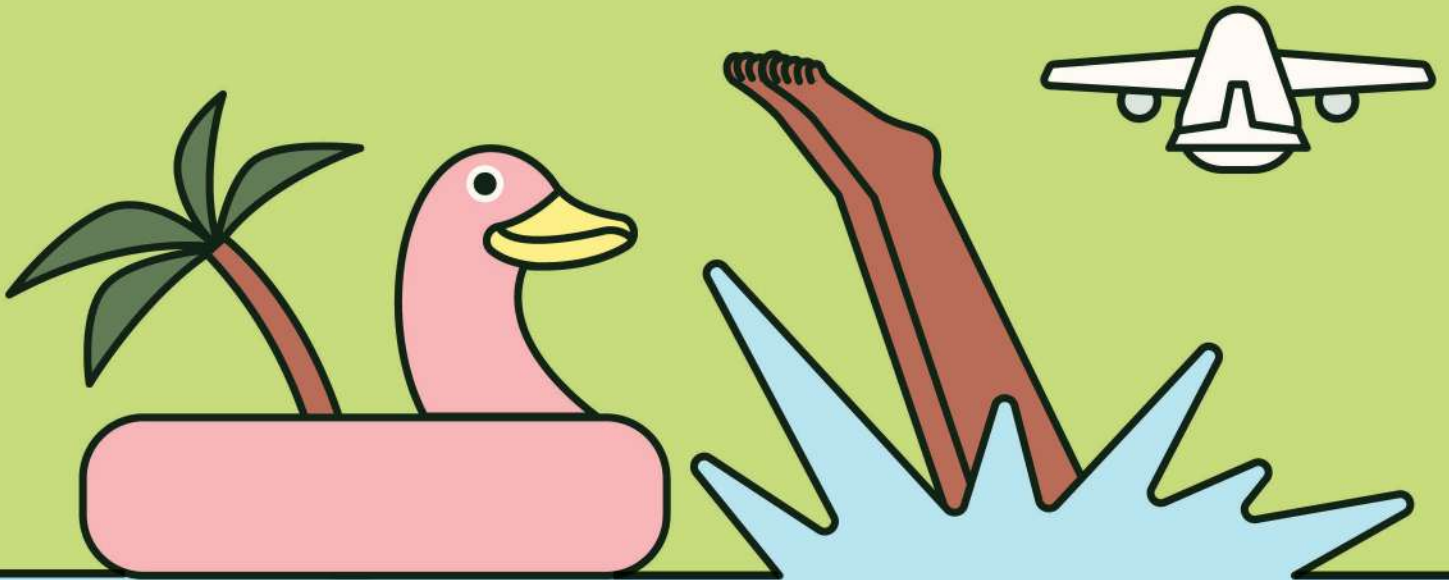
The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE **Google Pixel 7a** Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £449 from www.snipca.com/55250

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Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

MINI PC

GMKtec NucBox K11

£700 from www.snipca.com/54341

Tested Issue 707



A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8

Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage. £799 from www.snipca.com/55383

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite

£160 from www.snipca.com/52730

Tested Issue 698



The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

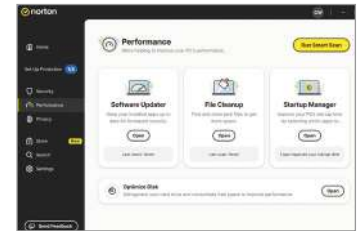
ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025

£14.99 from www.snipca.com/54797

Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm Gen Digital, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a three-device, two-year licence at a special discount price. Other versions are available.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Obsbot Meet SE

£79 from www.snipca.com/54725

Tested Issue 710



The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £63 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE

£188 from www.snipca.com/54190

Tested Issue 692



An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB

£76 from www.snipca.com/52658

Tested Issue 630



In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £76; 2TB costs £150.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £76 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 5... Majority Naga 60 soundbars

With a built-in 2.5in subwoofer and 2x2.25in speaker drivers for immersive audio and seamless HDMI Arc integration, the Majority Naga 60 soundbar delivers cinematic sound to your living room for entrancing entertainment.

Boasting 120W of power, it provides exceptional high-fidelity sound quality and helps breathe life into movies, music and games with the dynamic EQ controls.

It comes with a premium remote control for easy listening, so you can

adjust volume, modes and settings as required. With brackets included, it mounts easily for a clean, modern look.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/55428 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 12 August. Good luck!

You can buy the **Majority Naga soundbar** for £63 from www.snipca.com/55429. For more Majority products, including DVD players,



MAJORITY

Bluetooth turntables, speakers and radios, visit www.majority.co.uk and 'like' www.facebook.com/MajorityAudio.

PRINTER

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e

£186 from www.snipca.com/53101

Tested Issue 700



A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810

Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB

£160 from www.snipca.com/53637

Tested Issue 703



It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung CU8000

More expensive, but has a 55in LED screen and sharp 4K resolution. Connectivity is good, with three HDMI and two USB ports. £399 from www.snipca.com/55557

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800

£180 from www.snipca.com/52957

Tested Issue 665



This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560

Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £219 from www.snipca.com/52051

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HOW TO...

Tidy your messy desktop with Fences

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Fences 6 **Time required:** 30 minutes

Everyone knows how tough it can be to focus on an important job when you have a lot on your mind. It can be even worse when you're trying to focus in an untidy, cluttered environment. It's not because we're weak-willed, either: it's a scientific fact.

In a 2011 study (www.snipca.com/55398), researchers at Princeton University's department of psychology found that "multiple stimuli present in the visual field at the same time compete for neural representation by mutually suppressing their evoked activity throughout the visual cortex". Or, in layman's terms, with so many things competing for your attention, you don't

know what to focus on first.

There is a counter-argument to this – that an untidy environment can actually encourage creativity (so-called 'creative chaos') and, again, studies back it up. One, published in 2013 (www.snipca.com/55399), found that people who spent time in a disorderly room were more creative than people who spent time in an orderly room.

Your own opinion is likely to be coloured by your personal experiences, but the fact remains that it's usually easier and quicker to find the files you need on a tidy, organised computer than it is on one where your data is scattered



here, there and everywhere.

The trouble is, many modern operating systems indulge our bad habits. Gnome, the graphical environment used on many Linux distros, doesn't allow anything to be saved to the desktop, but Windows and macOS do. Many of us will save files on the desktop temporarily, fully intending to delete or reorganise them when we have time. Frequently, however, we never do have enough time, the files stay where they are, and the mess can start to snowball.

Here, we explain how to use Stardock's Fences (version 6) program to keep your desktop in good order.

1

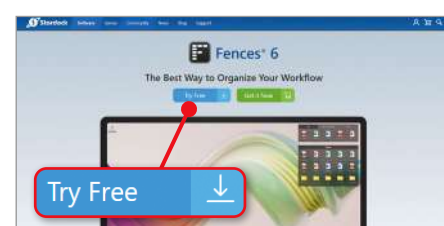
Start a free trial of Fences

Should the desktop really be out of bounds entirely? It's such a useful space – and one that you'll see dozens of times every time you use your computer. Wouldn't it be great if you could use it to both temporarily store the files you immediately need to open, and as a hub through which you could quickly access folders and keep your most frequently used programs close at hand without pinning them to the taskbar?

That's probably what the developers

of Fences – US firm Stardock – asked themselves, before going on to develop a program that does just that. To give it a try, go to www.snipca.com/55404 and click the blue Try Free button (see screenshot right). When the file has downloaded, launch 'Fences6-fs-setup.exe' from your Downloads folder, then follow the instructions. When installation has completed and Fences 6 automatically launches, click 'Start 30 Day Trial' and you can try it before spending any money.

Enter your email address and Stardock will send you a message. Click the 'Activate 30-Day Trial' button that it



Click the 'Try Free' button to use Fences on a 30-day trial

contains to verify that your email address is correct and active. This will switch you back to Fences and enable the software. Click Finish on the installer to complete the process.

When you clicked the link you'll have been opted into Stardock's email subscriptions for special offers, promotions and information about Fences 6. If you want to opt out of these immediately, click the Manage Email Subscriptions link on the page that will already be open in your browser and untick the three boxes on the following page. When you've done so, click Submit.

After 30 days you'll need to decide whether Fences is worth paying for. We think its £9.99 annual subscription is superb value, as indeed is the £27.99 for a permanent licence. Those prices are for just one machine. To install on up to five, you'll need to pay £18.99 a year or £45.99 for a permanent licence – for details visit www.snipca.com/55455.

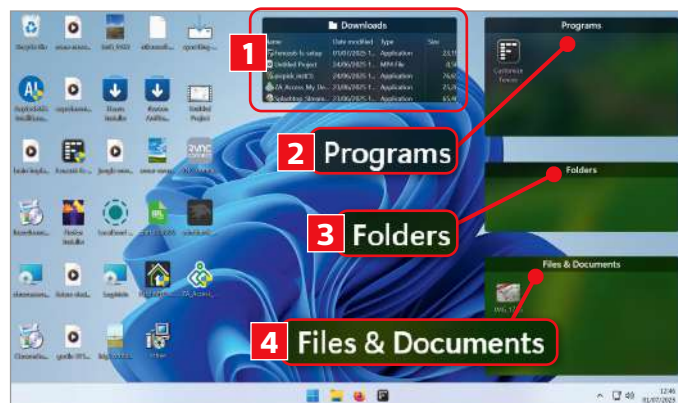
A decent free option is Portals (www.snipca.com/55406), though unsurprisingly it doesn't have as many features. As with Fences, it uses defined areas on your desktop as containers for folders, documents, photos and more.

2

Drag files into Fences' panels

Fences helps to keep your desktop organised by ring-fencing elements on screen. These are set up in advance so that they don't keep rearranging themselves as your desktop contents change. You'll have already come across the concept of preset areas in Windows' snap windows, where you can drag active program windows to the edges or corners of the screen. They then neatly arrange themselves into preset shapes.

Fences comes with several preset layouts, but you can create your own. The



Fences adds four preset zones to your screen

How I keep my desktop tidy

I tend not to save files to my desktop but I do have a bad habit of storing things I'm working on in the Downloads folder – purely because when I've downloaded a file and need to edit it I know where I'll find it. Unfortunately, I'm now also saving files I've created from scratch there, intending to reorganise them "when I have time". So far, that "time" has yet to arrive. Perhaps with some help from Fences I can start saving on the desktop when a file isn't ready to move to the appropriate library. That way, I can clear out my Downloads folder when it starts to bloat without risking deleting any important files.



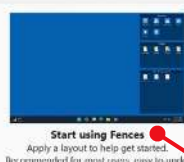
Nik Rawlinson



How do you keep your desktop tidy?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Getting started with Fences

Fences was designed to help you use your desktop. To help you get started, Fences can create a couple of starter-Fences and do a quick cleanup of your desktop.



Start using Fences

Select 'Start using Fences' to work with its preset layouts

launch screen therefore asks what you'd like to do first: start using Fences with its default layouts or define your own areas from scratch. For the moment, to familiarise yourself with how it works, click 'Start using Fences' (see screenshot above). This lets you work with the preset layouts.

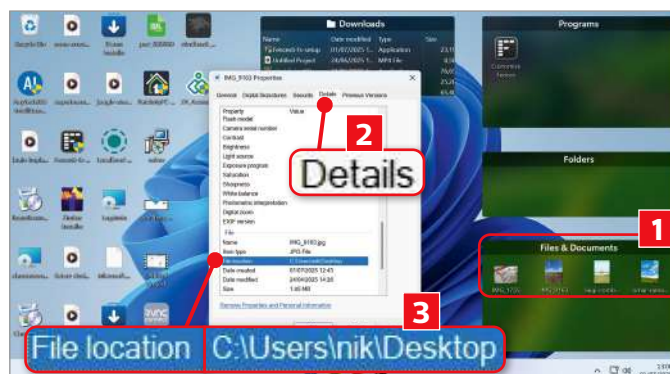
You might not immediately think things have improved. Any mess that was on your desktop is still there, and it will have been joined by floating panels for your Downloads (1 in our screenshot below left), Programs (2), Folders (3) and 'Files & Documents' (4). However, this is just your starting point. Each of these

panels is a container for what you might otherwise dump on the desktop. You just need to put them to good use.

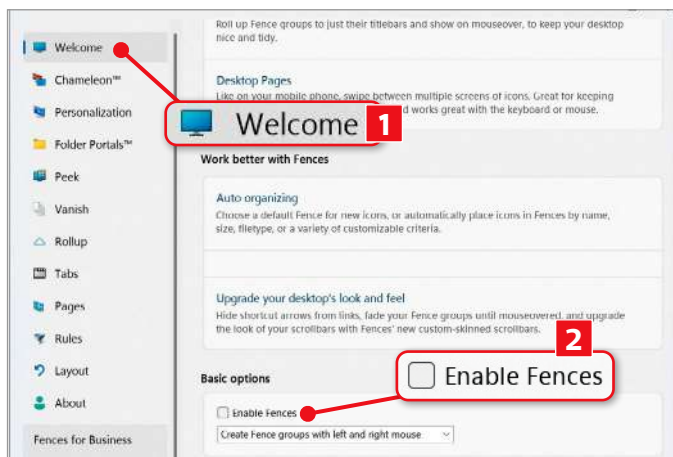
Let's start by sorting out the documents and other files you need to keep. Naturally, if any can be filed in the dedicated Windows libraries for Documents, Pictures, Videos and so on – which you'll find in the File Explorer sidebar – you should move them there. If any can be deleted, drag them to the recycle bin. Everything else, which you're still working with and want to keep close at hand, drag into the 'Files & Documents' panel.

When you drop a file here, it disappears from the cluster of icons on your desktop. So, where has it gone? The answer is quite simple: nowhere.

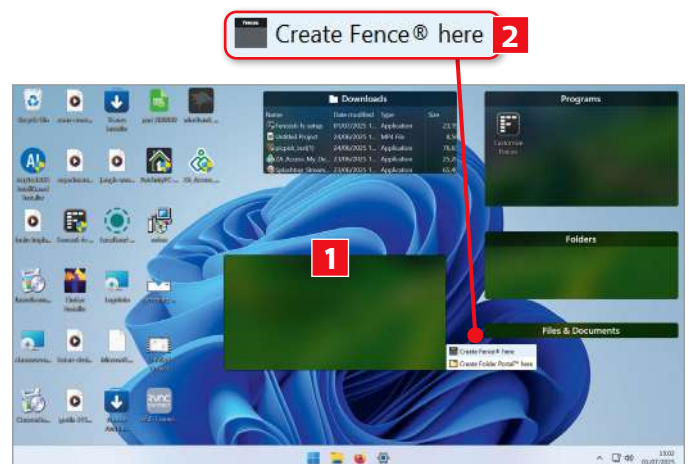
In our screenshot below we've dragged four images into the 'Files & Documents' area (1). By right-clicking one (IMG_9163), then clicking Properties, followed by the Details tab (2), we can scroll down to the metadata and see that the 'File location' is C:\Users\nik\Desktop (3). So, the file hasn't been removed from the desktop; it's just been hidden now that we've filed it appropriately.



The metadata shows us that Fences has hidden the file, but it's still on our desktop



Untick this box and Fences will be disabled, returning your files to your desktop



You can create your own fences by dragging out a rectangle on the desktop

This is important for two reasons. First, it means the file is still where we expect to find it if we open the Desktop folder in File Explorer. To verify this for yourself, open File Explorer, click Desktop in the sidebar and look for your file. It will be there, even though it's not actually visible on your desktop. Second, it means that should you ever uninstall Fences your files will still be where you expect to find them. Any that have been hidden should reappear.

If you want to check this, right-click anywhere on the desktop (not in File Explorer's Desktop folder) followed by Configure Fences. Now, with Welcome selected in the sidebar (1 in our screenshot above), scroll down to the bottom of the main pane and untick Enable Fences 2. Immediately, the preset panels will disappear and the files you dragged into them will be reinstated on your desktop. To set Fences running again simply re-tick the box.

3 Create your own panels

The panels for Programs and Folders let you quickly go to the software and locations you use most often, without going via the Start menu or digging through File Explorer. The Downloads folder shows your recent downloads, though you won't be able to change their order by clicking the headings at the top.

These default fences are well thought out to get you started and will suit most users. However, to add more just click and hold on the desktop, then drag out a rectangle (1 in our screenshot above right). When you let go of your mouse or trackpad button, click 'Create Fence here' in the menu that appears 2.

4 Master Fences' hidden features

Fences has some clever hidden features that won't be immediately

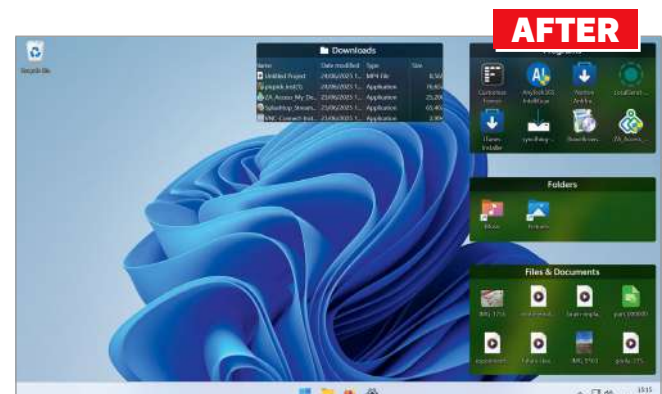
obvious, but can help you make best use of your screen space. For example, double-click any blank area in the title bar of a fenced-off section and it will roll up into itself to reveal the desktop below. Or, drag one fenced area on top of another to combine them. They will then be stacked, and you can switch between them by clicking the tabs for each in the title bar.

To quickly hide everything, double-click any blank area on your desktop, and the icons, folders and programs stored there – along with the panels managed by Fences – will disappear. Double-click again to get them back.

You can also quickly reveal your fences, but not the desktop, by pressing Windows key+Space. When you do this, the panels will pop up and sit on top of your active program without you having to minimise the window in which you're working.

THE END RESULT

Look at the before and after images below that show a messy Windows desktop before we installed Fences, and a far more organised environment with Fences active.



Crop your photos with PhotoDemon

What you need: PhotoDemon

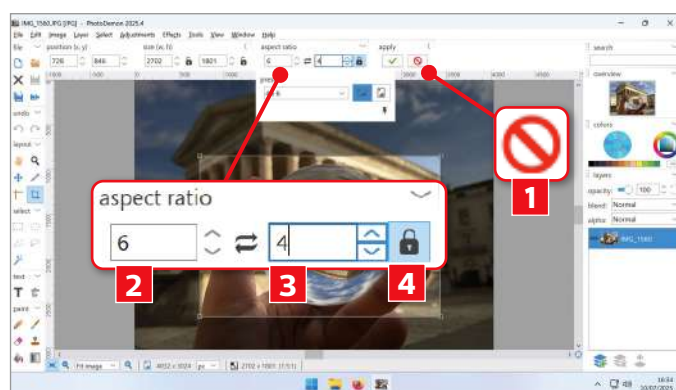
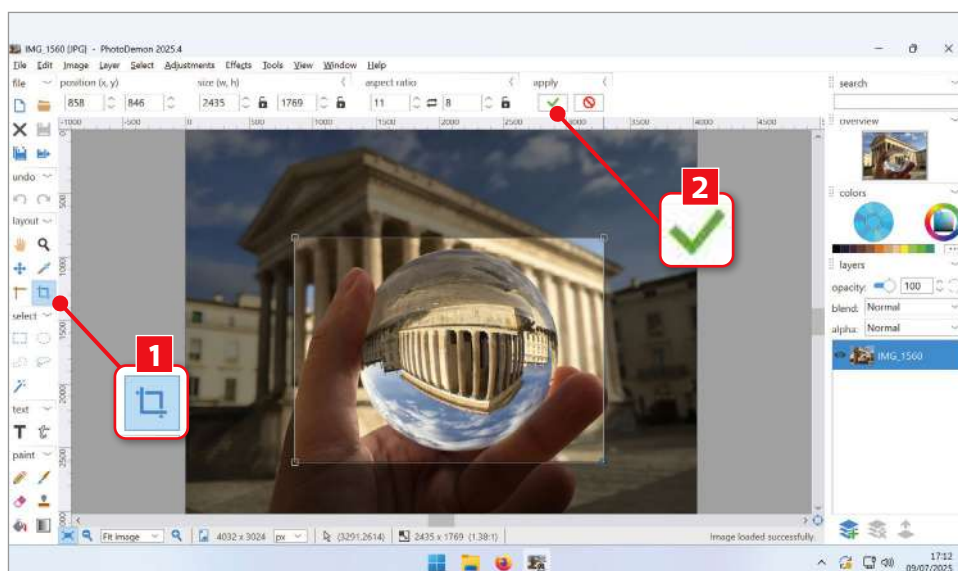
Time required: 30 minutes

Photos often benefit from a little bit of trimming. Even if you've zoomed in or got physically closer to your subject when taking the shot, removing surplus detail helps focus the eye on what really matters. Most image editors can do this, but here we're going to use the recently updated and free

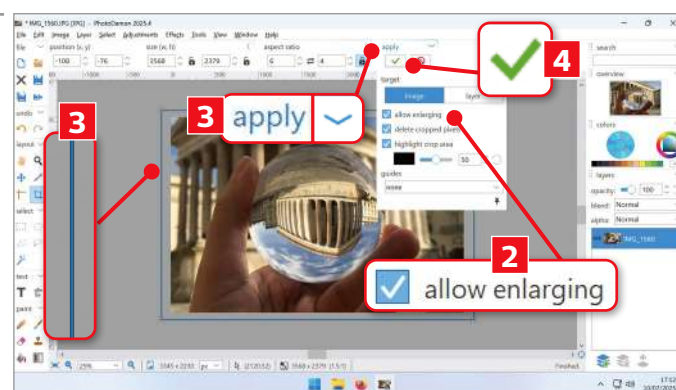
PhotoDemon, which has an interesting and unusual trick up its sleeve: it can both crop out (make an image larger) as well as crop in (make one smaller). Download PhotoDemon from www.photodemon.org. Because it's a portable program you can run it from a USB stick.



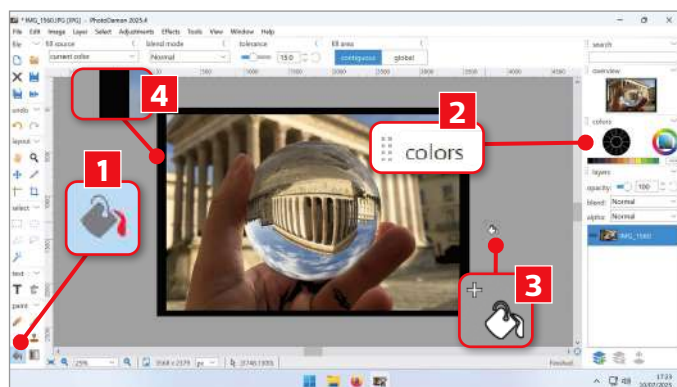
STEP 1 Open your image by clicking 'Open image...' on the launch screen. As you can see from our screenshot, the main focus in our image is the inverted view in a crystal ball. Unfortunately, this is getting lost in the wider frame, where we can also see the original subject matter in the background. To give your central subject more prominence, you need to crop in to what really matters in the picture. Click the crop tool **1**, then click, hold and drag, from one corner of the main part of the image to the other. As you can see, PhotoDemon darkens the area that you're removing. If you're happy with the result, click the tick icon **2** to complete the crop.



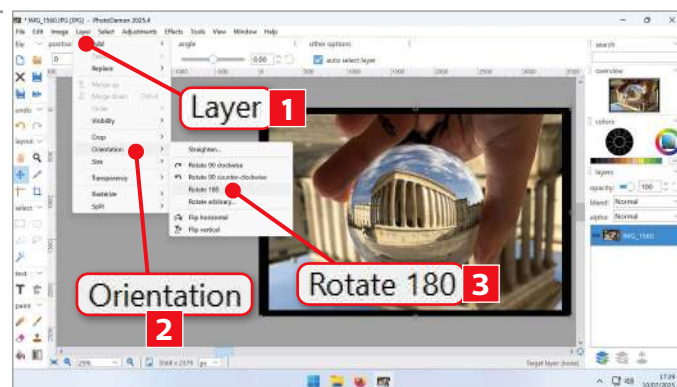
STEP 2 However, before you do, take a look at the other options above the image. In particular, the 'aspect ratio' boxes. In Step 1, these showed we had masked off an area with a ratio of 11:8. This is a very unusual ratio that wouldn't fit exactly on a standard photo paper size if we chose to make a physical print of our picture. Click the cancel button **1**, then change the measurements to 6 **2** and 4 **3**, then click the padlock **4**. Now drag out a new selection area – as described in Step 1.



STEP 3 Many crop tools only let you make an image smaller, but in PhotoDemon you can also use it to enlarge an image. Click the 'apply' header **1**, then click the tickbox beside 'allow enlarging' **2**. Now, click a point that's outside the image, then hold your mouse button and drag to a point that's a similar distance outside of the image on the opposite corner. You can see the area we've defined marked with a blue border **3**. Next, click the tick icon **4**.

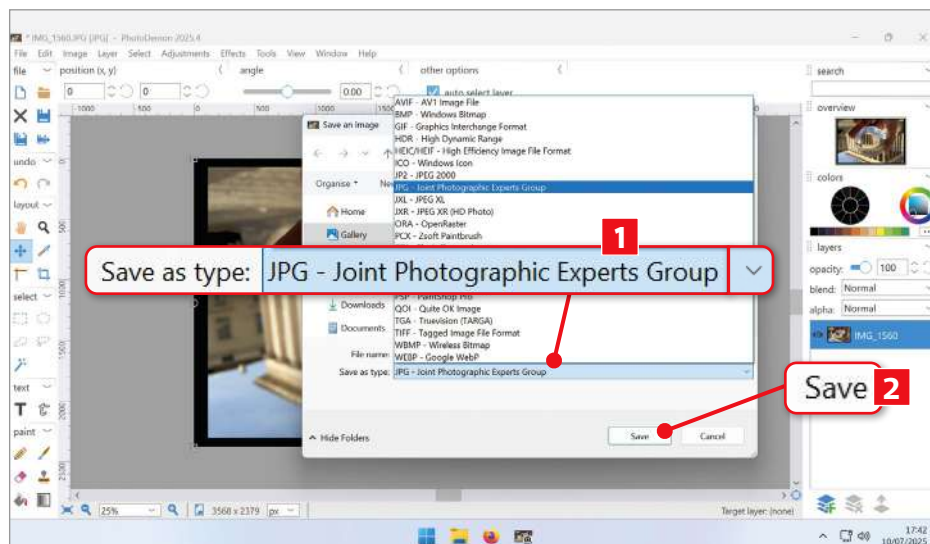
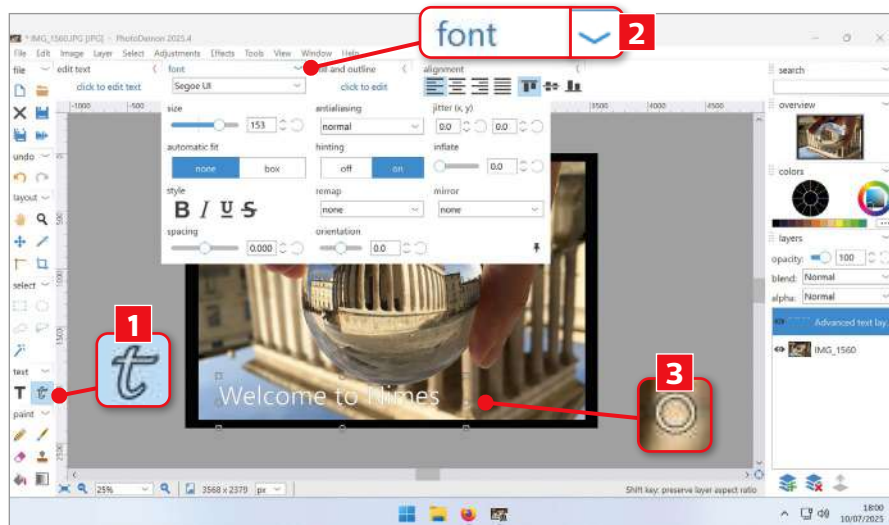


STEP 4 Now, you have a transparent gap around the image. To turn it into a border, press F or click the flood-fill tool **1**. Now select a colour by clicking one of the colour chips **2** on the 'colors' panel. Now hover the small cross to the left of the bucket icon **3** over the transparent area around your cropped layer and click your mouse. The space will be filled with black, creating a border **4** that draws the eye to the main area of your image.



STEP 5 Apart from cropping, PhotoDemon has a whole range of decent photo-editing tools. So, let's tweak our image further. Our test photo is a little confusing, because the subject is blurred and in the background, while the focused section (in the crystal ball) is upside down. To correct this, click Layer **1**, then hover over Orientation **2** and click Rotate 180 **3** to spin the picture around. When we do that with our image it immediately becomes more striking, as you can see in our screenshot.

STEP 6 Our test shot would work well as a postcard – so, we'll add some text. Click the artistic text tool **1**, then click on the image and drag out a text frame. Type your text into the box that appears. Now click the 'font' header **2** and use the controls to change the typeface, size and style. Doing this may mean your text no longer sits neatly in your box, so use the drag handles **3** on the box itself to resize it so the text fits.



STEP 7 When you've finished working on your photo, you should save a copy so that the original remains unchanged. Press Ctrl+Shift+S to open the 'Save as' box. PhotoDemon has its own file format with a '.pdi' extension. However, by clicking the 'Save as type' menu **1**, you can select a wide range of common formats, including **JPEG**, Photoshop (PSD), **GIF** and **PNG**. Don't forget to change the file name if you're using the existing extension and don't want to overwrite the original. Click Save **2** to complete the job.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

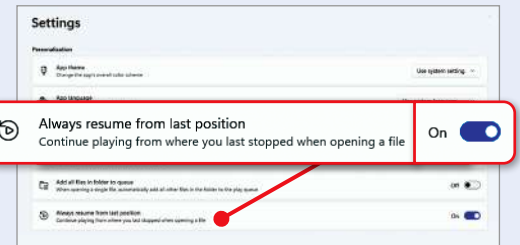
Set videos to resume from your last position

I've been trying Screenbox (www.snipca.com/55147) since your Workshop on it in Issue 713 (page 38). As you say, it has real potential to be a long-term alternative to VLC, which urgently needs an update.

One handy option is to resume a video from the position where you last stopped watching it. I was surprised this is turned off by default, because it seems such an obvious benefit. To activate it, open Screenbox then click

Settings bottom left. Now look under the General heading and turn on the slider 'Always resume from last position' (see screenshot).

If those sliders look familiar, it's because they're identical to Windows – and therefore easy to use. I don't know if the developer is allowed to mimic Windows so closely, but I wish more would. I don't know why software designers feel the need to clutter their menus with



unnecessary colours and animations.

Nigel Furlong



Nigel wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433

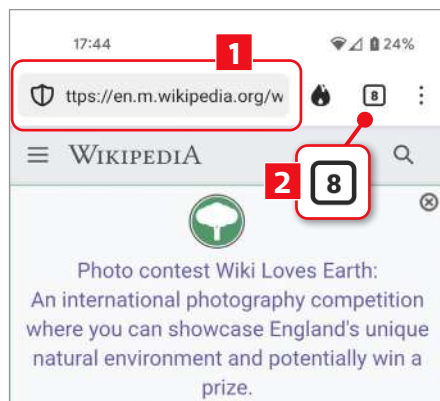
APPS

Swipe DuckDuckGo's browser bar to move through tabs

✓ I've become more privacy-conscious in the past few years, so now use DuckDuckGo's mobile browser on my Android phone. It does a decent job, and is updated regularly with handy features. One of these is swiping the

browser bar (1 in our screenshot below left) to move through tabs you have open in the background. The screenshot shows I have eight tabs open (2), so if I started on the first tab I'd swipe seven times to get to the final one. The key to it is to swipe *lightly* left and right, not to press down and swipe.

Ed Spencer

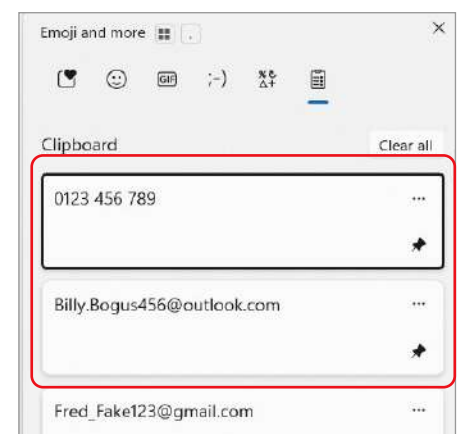


WINDOWS

Pin email addresses and phone numbers to your clipboard

✓ Your solution to Robert Garbolinski's problem of creating a keyboard shortcut to paste his email address is elegant (Issue 713, page 64) but seems too complicated for someone like me who wants to paste any one of four different email addresses, plus a couple of phone numbers, without needing to install yet another tool.

My solution is simple – and is one you



mentioned in the same issue's Make Windows Better section (page 46). I simply pin the email addresses and phone numbers to the clipboard (see screenshot above), then press Windows Key+V to see them. I then just scroll down to the relevant entry and click it.

Mike Hall

Why I stopped using...

My HP printer

✓ I've decided to retire my HP Officejet Pro 8620 printer, bought back in 2014. The original inks cost £69.95 for XL, but that's risen to £141.99, which is just too expensive.

And what I use instead...

I considered refillable ink tanks but eventually bought Brother's MFC-J4540DW multifunction printer (pictured). Full price is £250, though

I've seen it as low as £166 (www.snipca.com/55444). It comes with Brother's XL cartridges, which last for 3,000 pages in mono and 1,500 in colour.

But my main reason for buying it is that you can scan to a USB stick, which helps enormously because I scan loads of documents. It also means I have an immediate backup of my files – all in one location. I keep a separate USB stick as backup for each project.

The printer was very easy to set up on



our Wi-Fi network and prints very quickly. The quality is much better than on my old HP 8620.

Chris Adam

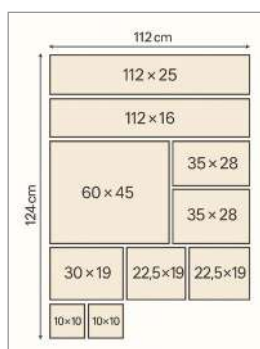
✉ Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

AI CHATBOTS

Use ChatGPT to produce cutting diagrams

✓ I'm always interested in your articles about AI, and this stood me in good stead recently when I needed to cut 10 pieces of material, all of a different size, from a roll that was 112cm wide. I struggled to work out how many metres I needed to buy, so I asked ChatGPT and gave it a list of all the individual pieces.

Not only did ChatGPT immediately calculate how many metres I needed to buy, it also then asked me if I needed a cutting diagram (pictured below) to show me the most economical way of cutting



out all the pieces without using too much material. I'd never have found this information using a standard search engine, and without ChatGPT I'd either still be working out how much material to buy, or I'd have already purchased far more material than I actually needed – just to be on the safe side.

Richard Underwood

PHONE

Turn on flight mode during cruise

✓ In response to William Robertson's question ('How do we get internet during our cruise?', Issue 713, page 67), I would add that he should put his phone into **flight mode** when at sea. Not doing so could prove very costly as mobile phones will connect to a maritime network and users will be charged accordingly. This is very expensive, so I'd recommend using it only in emergencies. We refuse to pay the exorbitant on-board Wi-Fi charges and just wait until we're in port (who needs email on a cruise anyway?).

Once ashore you need to be aware of **roaming fees**. We've been using Lebara's **SIM** cards (www.snipca.com/55431) while travelling for years and haven't had to pay for any extras (although it might be different in the US).

M McShane

APP

Play audiobooks through Bluetooth wireless earbuds

✓ I was looking for a way that people with poor eyesight could control

Reader recommends...

FiiO JM21 digital music player

£179 from Peter Tyson www.snipca.com/54124

✓ I don't trust streaming services. There have been too many occasions where they've pulled content people are watching or listening to. I prefer the old days of physical vinyl, cassettes and discs. Once you've bought those, no one can take them from you – except perhaps a burglar.

I've never signed up to Spotify or any music-streaming service. I've stuck with MP3 players, even though they're not fashionable anymore. And the FiiO JM21 is the best I've ever had. I hadn't heard of FiiO, and was a little wary because they're based in China, but your review in Issue 706 (page 26) was so

positive (a rare five stars!) that I thought it was worth the slight risk.

It's been a revelation. Sound quality is exceptional via my Sennheiser earbuds and there are physical controls, not just a touchscreen. Your review mentioned there's "just" 22GB of storage, but that's been enough for me so far. I've added 90 per cent of my collection and still haven't reached 15GB! Doubt I'll need to buy a **microSD card** to add more.

Raymond Horridge

✉ Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk



audiobooks through the Libby app (<https://libbyapp.com>). By accident, I found the solution using Bluetooth with wireless earbuds. When you put them in the audiobook starts, and the moment you take them out, the books finish. It works like magic!

Albert Kirk

MUSIC

Back up music to external drive using Brennan B2

✓ You were right to tell Richard Latham that the ability to format **FAT32** directly from the Windows menu disappeared long ago (see Issue 709, page 64).

He wants to back up his Brennan music device's 500GB hard drive to an external drive. He can do this using the Brennan B2 device (pictured below). It has a formatting tool in its Maintenance menu that can format an external device in FAT32. It's important to select 'Format USB A' or 'Format USB C', as appropriate, and not the internal drive 'Format HDD' which would wipe the music.

Also choose 'Export to C' in the USB Functions setting, not the menu option

listed as Backup. This allows the file to be imported to a second music player. The Backup option is slower but incremental.

I used export because I wanted to transfer the entire contents to a second identical machine. Brennan lists its menu functions at www.snipca.com/55433 – some have moved since my B2 was made.

John Kellett

PHONE

Use cordless handsets with VoIP

✓ In Issue 712 (page 67) Ed Mitchell asked whether he could keep his phone number after switching to fibre broadband. I managed to keep my landline number after moving to a **VoIP** provider – Maximum Networks (www.maximumnetworks.co.uk), based in Birmingham – who replaced my handset with a compatible model. Yealink phones (www.yealink.com, pictured below) can be used because some of them are cordless and so can be positioned away from the router.

Malcolm Bradley



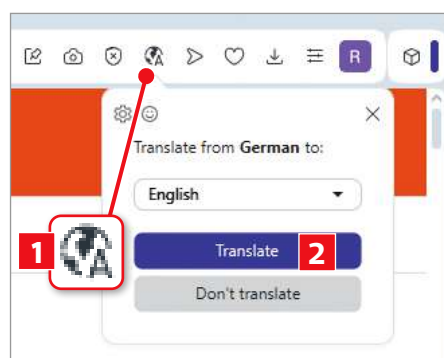
OPERA

Translate foreign-language web pages

Opera 120, released at the beginning of July, adds a feature you may have assumed it already had: built-in translation. Previously, if you wanted to translate foreign-language web pages in the browser you needed to install an add-on such as Google Translate.

When Opera detects foreign-language content, it should now automatically offer to translate the page into English. You can also translate manually by clicking the new Translate icon on the toolbar (1 in our screenshot below) then the purple Translate button (2).

Opera can translate more than 40 languages into English, including German, French, Spanish, Greek and Chinese. It currently only translates entire pages, not specific sections of text you select.

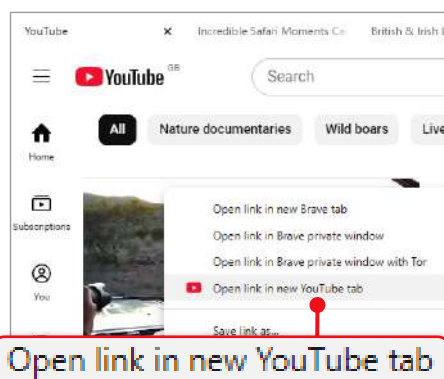


BRAVE

Open PWAs in tabbed windows

Brave has added the useful option to open **progressive web apps** (PWAs) in tabbed windows. This lets you switch between multiple pages of a website you've installed as a PWA, like you do with sites in the main browser. So, for example, you can play YouTube videos in new tabs without navigating away from your search results.

To open a PWA in a tabbed window, right-click it on Brave's Apps page



FIREFOX

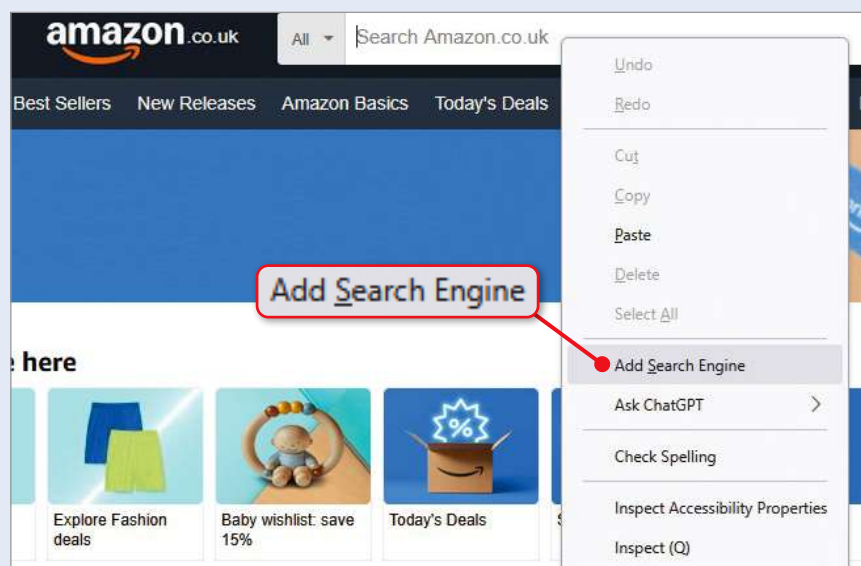
Add more search engines to Firefox

Firefox 140, released at the end of June, lets you expand the browser's selection of search engines. The five built-in options are Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo, eBay and Wikipedia, but you can now add any website that has its own search tool.

To add a search engine, such as Amazon, YouTube or the AI-powered Perplexity, simply right-click its search box and choose Add Search Engine (see screenshot). Enter its name and

optionally specify a keyword shortcut. This will let you search the site by typing @ then the keyword into Firefox's address bar – for example @amazon. Click 'Add Engine' to save the search engine to the browser.

To change your default search engine, click the browser's three-line menu button and choose Settings then Search. Scroll down to Search Shortcuts to see the full list of search engines and their respective keywords.



(brave://apps) and choose 'App settings'. Select 'Open in tabbed window' and when you next click the app, it will open with tabs. Right-click a link within the PWA and choose 'Open link in new [PWA name] tab' (see screenshot below left).

Other sites that support PWAs include Google Drive, Outlook and Proton Mail. Click the Install button in Brave's address bar to install them as apps.

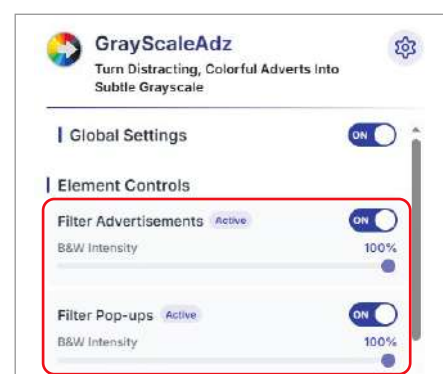
CHROMIUM

Make ads less distracting



A new extension called GrayscaleAdz (www.snipca.com/55412) makes adverts on web pages less annoying without blocking them. It turns colourful, distracting ads black and white so you can focus on the main content.

The extension also applies its grayscale filter to pop-ups and ads in YouTube



videos. You can customise its intensity by clicking its toolbar button and adjusting the B&W Intensity sliders (see screenshot above), and **whitelist** sites to preserve their ad colour.

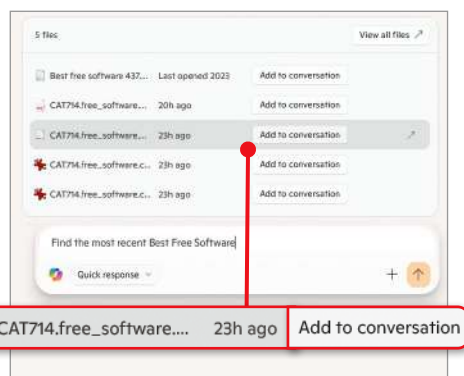
GrayscaleAdz is an interesting idea, and means sites aren't deprived of essential advertising revenue, but it doesn't always work. On Mail Online, for example, it made the whole homepage monochrome.

COPILOT

Find and analyse files on your PC

The Copilot app for Windows 10 and 11 can now search for files stored on your PC, saving you having to use the standard Windows Search tool. You can add files it finds to your chats and ask Copilot questions about them.

To activate this handy new feature, click the Account icon in the bottom-left corner of the Copilot app and choose Settings. Switch on the options 'File search' and 'File read'.



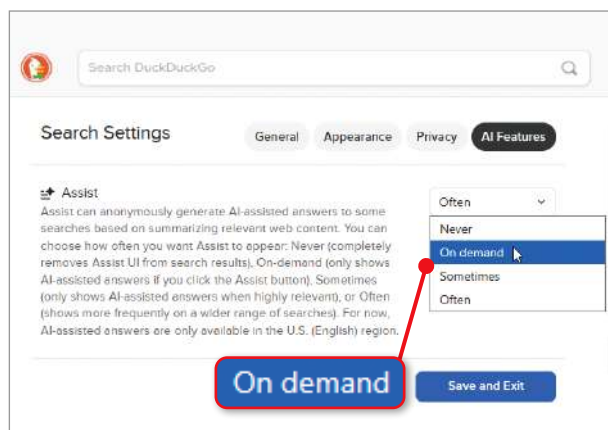
Ask Copilot to find a file and it will display a list of matching results. Click 'Add to conversation' (see screenshot above) to add a file to your chat, ask questions about its content and get Copilot to edit or rewrite the text.

Copilot can find files in most formats and 'read' documents in **DOCX**, **XLSX**, **TXT** and PDF format. Double-click a result to open that file in its default program.

DUCKDUCKGO

Control the AI answers in your search results

Like Google, DuckDuckGo now includes AI-generated answers in its search results through its Assist feature.



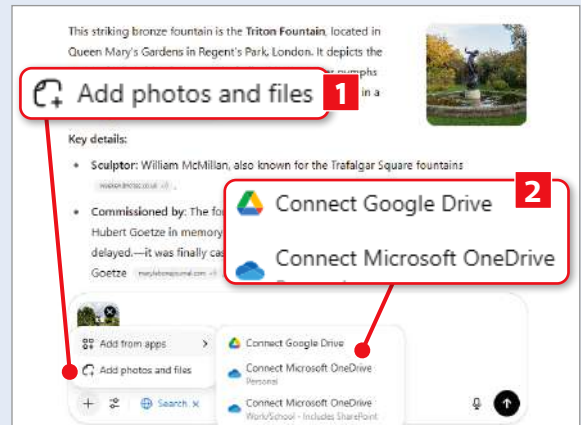
CHATGPT

Search the web using an image

ChatGPT has added the option to search the web using images – commonly referred to as a reverse-image search. This differs from its standard image-analysis feature, which merely describes the content of a picture.

With the new option, you don't even need to type a prompt. Just click the Tools button below the message box, select 'Search the web' then click the plus-sign button and choose 'Add photos and files' (1 in our screenshot).

Upload an image from your computer and ChatGPT will search the web for information about its subject, and cite its sources so you can visit those sites for further details. It can



also find different shots of the same subject.

ChatGPT can now be connected with Google Drive and OneDrive, so you can add photos and other files from those services. Click 'Add from apps' and choose 'Connect Google Drive' or 'Connect Microsoft OneDrive' (2).

Unlike Google, it lets you control how often you see them – or disable Assist altogether.

On the DuckDuckGo website, click the three-line menu button in the top-right corner and choose Settings, then AI Features. Click the dropdown menu next to Assist and select Sometimes, Often or Never to specify how frequently AI-assisted answers appear. Choose 'On demand' (see screenshot below) to only reveal them when you click the Assist button below the search box.

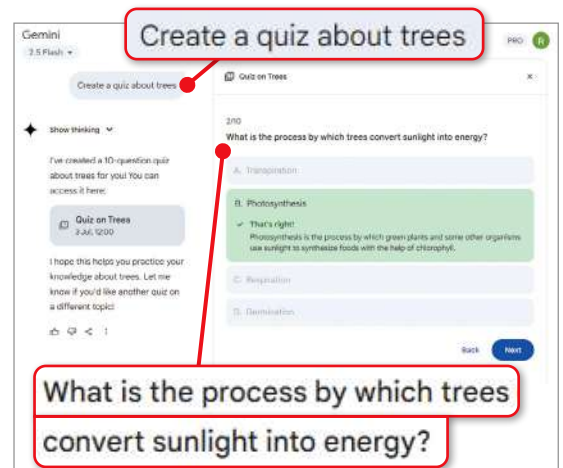
Click 'Save and exit' to confirm.

You can apply the same setting to Assist in DuckDuckGo's app for Android (www.snipca.com/55414) and iOS (www.snipca.com/55413).

GEMINI

Generate interactive quizzes

Gemini has introduced an interesting feature that



generates custom quizzes on any topic you can think of. Previously, it could suggest questions for a quiz, but the new option goes further by creating interactive quizzes, complete with hints and explanations for right and wrong answers.

Google says the feature can help students prepare for exams, but it's equally useful for testing your knowledge of a given subject. Just tell Gemini the topic (see screenshot above) and it will generate a 10-question, multiple choice quiz you can take on its website or in its mobile apps.

Phone and Tablet Tips

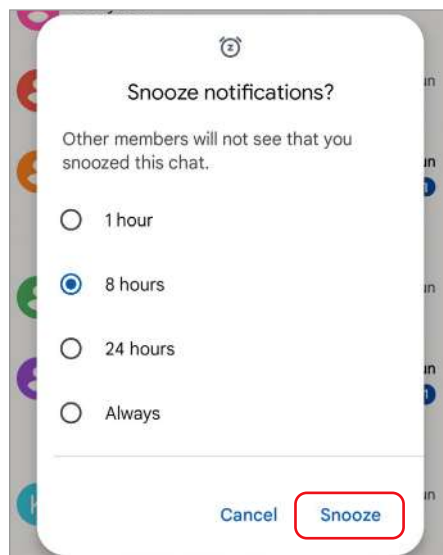
ANDROID

Snooze chats in Google Messages



Google Messages (www.snipca.com/55415) – the built-in messaging app on Android phones – has introduced a feature long available in WhatsApp: the ability to mute message notifications. This means you can now get on with important tasks, or have a nap, without your phone constantly pinging and demanding your attention.

The muting option, which Google calls Snooze, is particularly useful for silencing lively group chats, while allowing notifications from other contacts. It saves you having to activate your phone's 'Do not disturb' mode just to get a bit of peace.



To use the new feature, long-press a chat in your Messages inbox and tap the Snooze (alarm clock) button that appears on the top toolbar. Choose to snooze notifications for one hour, eight hours, 24 hours or always, then tap Snooze (see screenshot below left). You'll still receive messages from that person or group – you just won't hear them arrive.

Alternatively, open the contact-details page for a person by pressing their profile icon. Select 'Snooze chat' and choose how long to snooze them for. No one can tell you've snoozed them, though they may wonder why you're not responding.

ANDROID

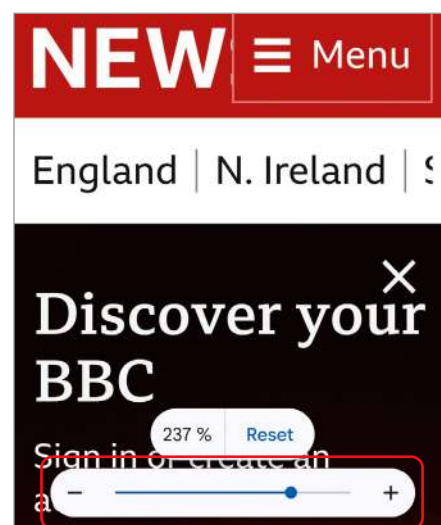
Zoom text in Chrome without messing up pages



Zooming into web pages makes small text easier to read, especially if you have poor eyesight. The trouble is it also enlarges everything else on the page, including images, menu bars and other layout elements, which often makes browsing the content more difficult.

To address this problem, Google has updated the Android version of its Chrome browser (www.snipca.com/55426) with an accessibility feature called Page Zoom. This increases the size of text without messing up the page layout. It works in most cases, at least – we found pages with lots of ads still became unwieldy when zoomed.

You can try the Page Zoom feature by tapping the three-dot menu icon in



Chrome's top-right corner when viewing a web page. Select 'Zoom' then use the slider that appears on screen to set your preferred zoom level (see screenshot above). Chrome will remember your preference for the next time you visit that site.

To review your saved zoom settings, choose Settings in the three-dot menu and tap Accessibility. Select 'Saved zoom for sites' to see the zoom levels you've set, and delete them if required. You can also set the default zoom level for all sites.

iOS

Manage photos in Google Photos more easily



Google has redesigned its popular Photos app, but curiously only the

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

Project Indigo

Free

iOS www.snipca.com/55416

This new app from Adobe is a versatile alternative to your iPhone's camera. Indigo captures and combines multiple images



for each shot to create superior results, and offers a night mode for low-light conditions. Its Super Resolution feature preserves image quality when you zoom in, and it uses AI to remove noise and reflections.

CoMaps

Free

Android www.snipca.com/55422

iOS www.snipca.com/55423

This new privacy-focused mapping app is a 'fork' of the popular Organic Maps. It offers



all the same features, including detailed maps you can explore offline, voice navigation and an Outdoors mode showing hiking trails. The only difference is a greater emphasis on community, with users encouraged to report bugs and suggest new tools.

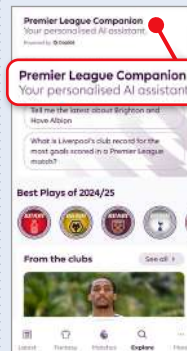
Premier League

Free

Android www.snipca.com/55418

iOS www.snipca.com/55419

The Premier League has revamped its app ahead of the 2025–26 season. New



features include Matchday Live, which offers live reports, scores and statistics; a MyPremierLeague tool for following your favourite clubs and players; and a Copilot-powered AI assistant that answers your PL questions.

iOS version (www.snipca.com/55427). This makes several improvements to the app's interface, without losing its simplicity.

When you view a picture in Google Photos, it now shows the date, time and location the shot was taken at the top of your screen (1 in our screenshot below). This is much more convenient than having to swipe up on the image to see this information.

The row of options along the bottom now includes an 'Add to' button (2), which lets you add the photo to a new or existing album, or move it to your

Archive or Locked Folder (where only you can open it). 'Add to' replaces the Google Lens button, which has been moved to the three-dot menu in the top-right corner.

This menu also includes the options Download, Cast and Create. Tap

the latter to create a collage, cinematic video, photo print or canvas print featuring the current photo.

Previously, Google Photos always displayed pictures on a black background, but it will now use a white one if you have the Light theme enabled on your iPhone or iPad. Hopefully, Android users won't have to wait too long to get the updated app.

iOS Streamline your Inbox in Apple Mail

Back in Issue 706 (page 45), we wrote about the new 'contact photos' feature in Apple Mail. This shows profile pictures or icons next to all the messages in your Inbox. Contact photos are intended to let you see at a glance who sent you each email, but many iPhone and iPad users have complained they make the Mail interface look cluttered.

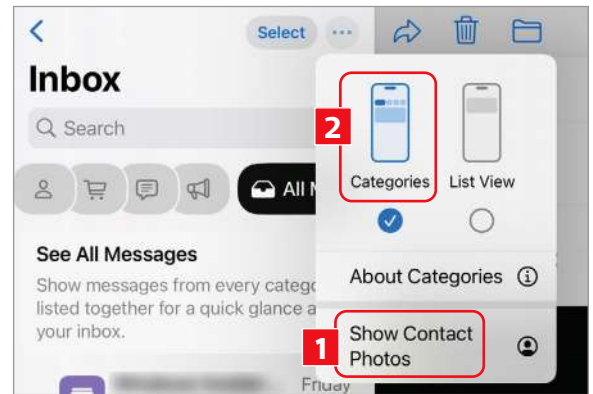
Disabling contact photos previously involved having to delve into your device's Settings, but iOS 18.5 – released in May – makes it much easier. Simply tap the three-dot icon in the top-right corner of your Inbox and deselect the option Show Contact Photos (1 in our screenshot above right).

In the same pop-up panel, you can

switch from the Mail app's new Categories view (2, which users have also complained about) to the classic List View. This will restore all your emails to a single list, rather than separating them into categories such as Primary, Transactions and Promotions.

However, iOS 18.5 also added an option that lets you keep the organisation of the Categories view while still seeing all your messages in one list. Simply swipe the

category labels to the left to reveal the hidden All Mail (envelope) button.



BEST APPS FOR...

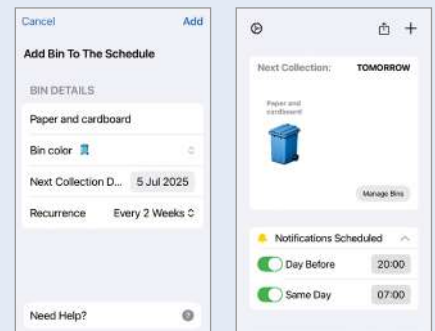
Lifestyle-related reminders

Bin Collection Reminder Free

iOS www.snipca.com/55436

Ensure you never miss a bin day using this simple app. Add a bin's details and colour (such as paper recycling, blue), the next collection date and the frequency. Schedule reminders for the night before and same-day morning to ensure you put your bins out in time. For Android, try the similar Bin Reminder (www.snipca.com/55434).

Best For Bin-day reminders



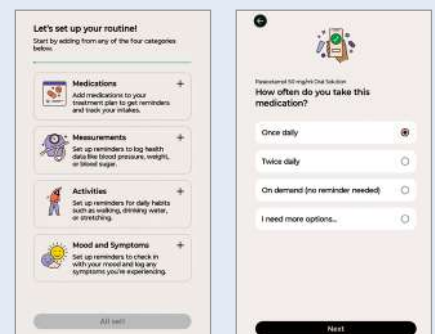
MyTherapy Pill Reminder Free*

Android www.snipca.com/55437

iOS www.snipca.com/55438

MyTherapy reminds you to take your medication at a scheduled time every day. You can add details manually or scan barcodes, specify the frequency and dosage, and get alerts when you need to order a repeat prescription. The app can also remind you about blood-pressure and blood-sugar readings, and medical appointments.

Best For Medication reminders



Water Reminder Free*

Android www.snipca.com/55446

This app ensures you drink enough water every day. Enter a few details about yourself and it will generate a hydration plan and remind you when to drink your glass, bottle or jug of water. Confirm you've done so and track your progress over time. For iOS, try an app with the same name from another developer: www.snipca.com/55439.

Best For Hydration reminders



*Contains in-app purchases

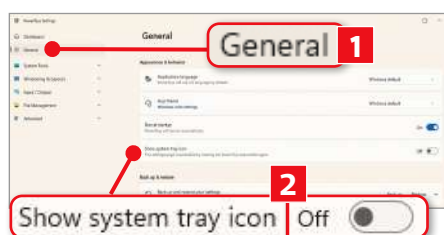
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Hide PowerToys' system-tray icon



When you launch PowerToys it places an icon in your system tray.

Version 0.92, released in early July, lets you remove this icon. Open PowerToys then click General at the top left (1 in our screenshot below). Now, on the right, scroll down to the 'Appearance & behavior' section and turn off the 'Show system tray icon' slider (2).



WINDOWS 11 INSIDER

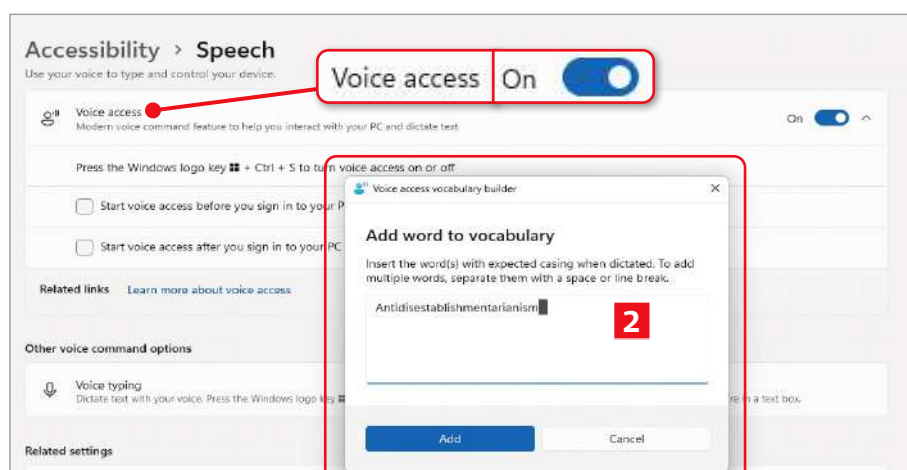
Add your own words to Voice Access



If you use Windows 11's Voice Access to control your PC with your voice, you can now teach it words it doesn't recognise, like your name, address or favourite software – though you'll need to be running Windows 11 Preview build 26120.

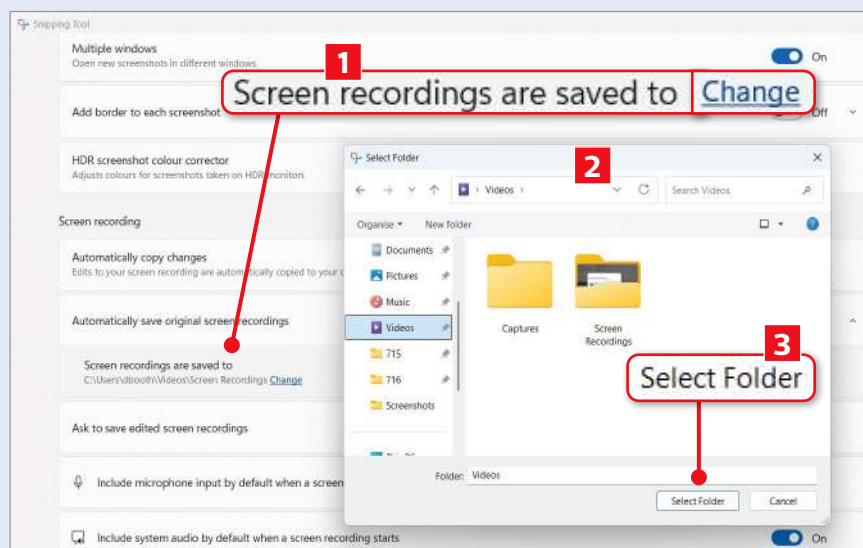
First, press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Accessibility followed by Speech, and make sure the Voice Access slider is on (1 in our screenshot below). You can also turn Voice Access on and off by pressing Windows key+Ctrl+S.

Now activate your microphone and say "add to vocabulary". A box will appear where you can type the word you want it to recognise (2). Click Add to confirm. You can also click the Settings cog top right then select 'Add to vocabulary' and type your word.



WINDOWS 11

Choose where screen recordings are saved to



By default, screen recordings captured by Snipping Tool are saved in the folder C:\Users\username\Videos\Screen Recordings. You can change this to another folder in Snipping Tool's settings.

Search for, then open Snipping Tool

then click the three dots top right followed by Settings. Scroll down to the 'Screen recording' section and click 'Change' under 'Screen recordings are saved to' (1 in our screenshot) and navigate to the folder you want to save them to (2). Click 'Select Folder' (3) to confirm.

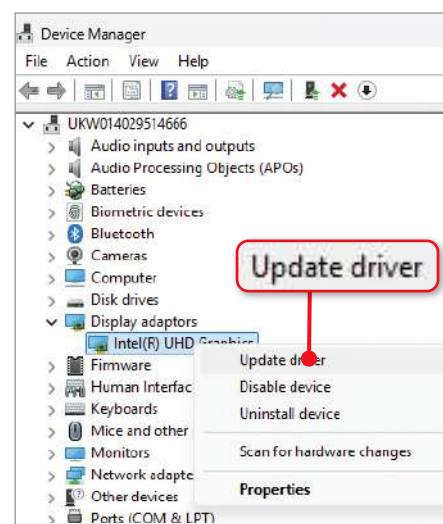
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Restart your graphics driver to fix problems



If your screen repeatedly flickers or goes black, or your graphics constantly freeze, try restarting your graphics driver without having to reboot your PC. Press Windows key+Ctrl+Shift+B. Your screen will briefly flicker, then recover. You should hear a beep too.

However, this shortcut is a fast, low-impact fix, not a permanent solution. If problems persist you might need to update or reinstall your graphics drivers. To do this, type and open Device Manager then click 'Display adaptors' followed by 'Update driver' (see screenshot below). You can also look for an update on the manufacturer's website.

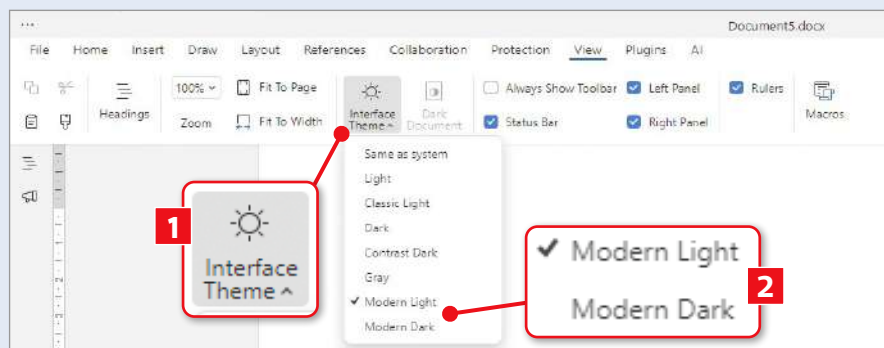


ONLYOFFICE

Use new Modern Light or Dark design

 Version 9 of OnlyOffice, released on 18 June, lets you choose a new 'Modern Light' or 'Modern Dark' theme across all its tools. These add new icons and colours to the tickboxes, and increase the space between headings and options at the top – all of which, OnlyOffice claims, “prioritises clarity and ease of use”.

To see if you like one of these new themes, click View at the top, then Interface Theme (1 in our screenshot) and select the light or dark option (2). It will change instantly. In our screenshot we've chosen Modern Light.



There are over 20 new tools in OnlyOffice 9, including many powered by AI. We'll cover the best over the next few months. If you're already using

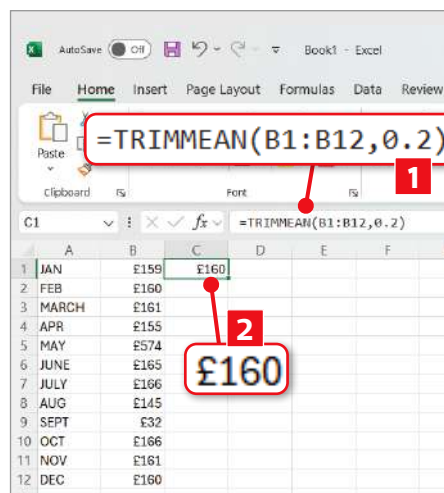
OnlyOffice, you can update it to version 9 by clicking About and looking for an update link. To install it directly visit www.snipca.com/55452.

LIBREOFFICE CALC & MICROSOFT EXCEL

Exclude highest and lowest amounts from average

 Both Calc and Excel let you exclude the highest and lowest amounts from a range of cells when you calculate averages. This could be handy if you want a realistic average that's not swayed by a couple of unrepresentative high or low figures – such as a particularly cheap or expensive month for bills.

Most of the payments in rows B1 to B12 are around £160, with May (£574) and September (£32) being outliers. To exclude them, we typed `=TRIMMEAN(B1:B12,0.2)` (1 in our screenshot below). Typing 0.2 excludes 20 per cent of our data, which is the top 10 and bottom 10 per cent. This produces



	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	JAN	£159	£160			
2	FEB	£160				
3	MARCH	£161				
4	APR	£155				
5	MAY	£574				
6	JUNE	£165				
7	JULY	£166				
8	AUG	£145				
9	SEPT	£32				
10	OCT	£166				
11	NOV	£161				
12	DEC	£160				

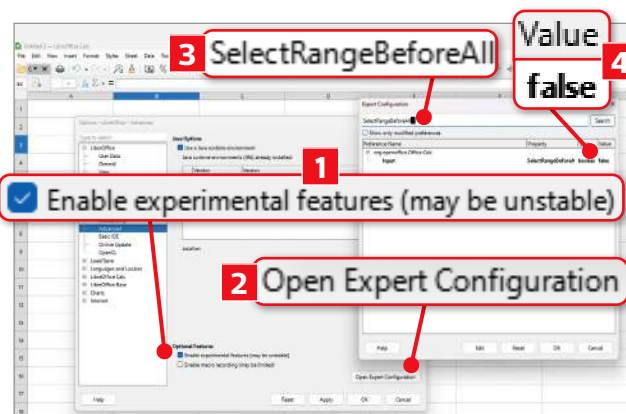
an expected average of £160 (2). Without that, the average is £184.

Which figures you use depend on how many high and low figures you want to exclude from the average. Typing 0.1 removes 10 per cent (five per cent each from top and bottom), 0.3 removes 30 per cent and so on.

LIBREOFFICE CALC Select whole sheet with one press

 Pressing Ctrl+A in Calc selects just the current block of data around your cursor, and pressing it again selects the entire sheet. You can change this so pressing Ctrl+A just once selects the whole sheet.

Click Tools in Calc's top menu bar, then Options at the bottom. In the menu on the right click LibreOffice, then Advanced, then make sure 'Enable experimental features (may be unstable)' is ticked (1 in our screenshot above right). Now



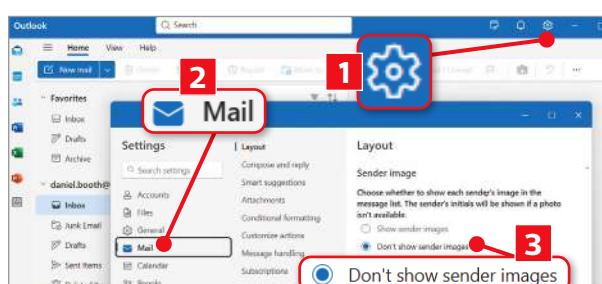
click the 'Open Expert Configuration' button (2) and at the top search for `SelectRangeBeforeAll` (3) then press Enter.

Now click the plus sign next to 'org.openoffice.Office.Calc' and double-click the Input line below so the Value shows 'false' (4). Click OK to confirm.

MICROSOFT OUTLOOK Hide senders' images in your inbox

 The new version of Outlook lets you hide the photos and initials of people that appear to the left

of emails in your inbox. Click the Settings cog at the top right (1 in our screenshot left) then Mail on the left (2). Now scroll down the Layout section on the right and select 'Don't show sender images' (3). It's applied automatically.



In The Club



Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

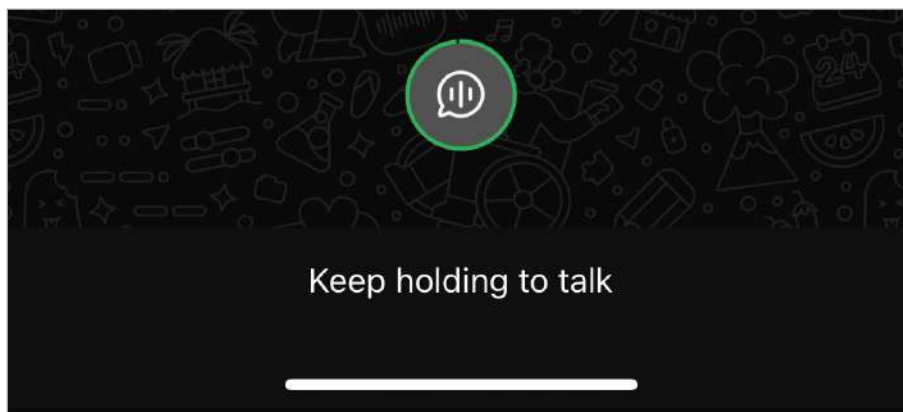
Have voice chats in your WhatsApp groups

If you've ever needed to get your club members together for a quick chat, you'll know how difficult it can be – especially at short notice. That's where WhatsApp's group voice-chat feature comes in. Available in the phone and tablet app (including the new iPad version), it provides an easy, unobtrusive way to start a conversation with all your club members.

It's voice-only, so there's no off-putting video to contend with. It won't make anyone's phone ring, so you won't ever disturb your members at an awkward moment. And, if your club already has its own WhatsApp group, it means you can start a voice conversation with everyone without the need for a separate app.

WhatsApp added group voice chat to its app in 2023. Until recently, it worked for larger groups only (between 33 and 256 members), but in May it made the feature available for smaller groups too. There are plenty of ways this could come in handy – from coordinating logistics on the day of an event, to planning a last-minute change of venue, or holding a short committee discussion without needing to share a Zoom link with everyone. You can talk and text at the same time, and people can come and go as they please.

Best of all, it's incredibly simple to use – even for your most tech-wary members. And, of course, it's fully protected by



Swipe up from the bottom and hold your finger on the screen until this icon completes a circle

WhatsApp's **end-to-end encryption**, meaning conversations stay private and secure. Here's how to get started.

Check members can use group voice chat

First, make sure everyone has access to the new group voice chat feature. WhatsApp has been rolling it out gradually since May, so most people should have received it by now (see www.snipca.com/55445). However, it's worth posting a message in your club's group chat asking all members to check they're running the latest version of WhatsApp. They can do this by searching their phone's app store for WhatsApp and tapping the Update button if it's shown. If

it says Open instead, that means their app is up to date.

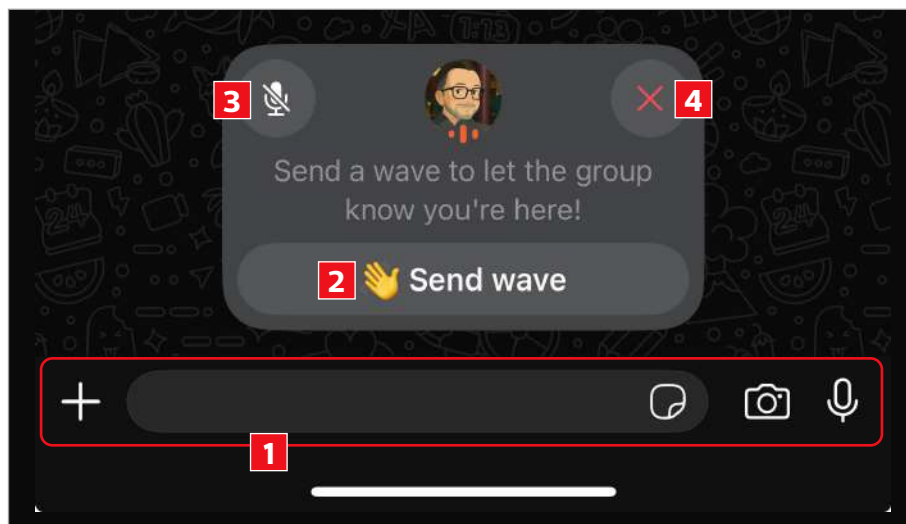
Grab the attention of members

You can start a group voice chat at any point by navigating to your club's group chat, then swiping up from the bottom of the screen and holding your finger on the screen until the green ring around the speech bubble icon completes a full circle (see screenshot above). The first time you do this, you'll see a 'Talk together' message. When you do, tap Start.

You'll now see a mini voice-chat toolbar at the bottom of the group chat (1 in our screenshot below left). Unlike a normal voice call, your group members' phones won't ring when you start a voice chat. So, to get their attention you'll need to tap 'Send wave' 2. This will send a notification to your group members that you've started a chat, and invite them to take part, which they can do by tapping Join.

During your chat, members can tap the microphone icon 3 to mute themselves, while continuing to listen. They can tap the red cross to leave the chat 4. This doesn't remove them from the group, and they can rejoin your voice-chat session at any point while it's still active.

When the meeting's over, the person who started the group voice-chat session can tap the red cross to end it. If you forget to do this, WhatsApp will automatically end the session after 60 minutes of inactivity.



Grab your members' attention by tapping 'Send wave'

What's All the Fuss About...

Adaptive Energy Saver

You can't take a dim view of Microsoft's new tool for boosting battery life

What is it?

A new tool in Windows 11 that prolongs your laptop's battery life *without* dimming the screen. This makes it better than the current Energy Saver in Windows (build 24H2), which *isn't* adaptive and so is a much cruder tool.

Can you explain what adaptive means?

Yes. In technology, it describes a feature that automatically adapts to changing conditions and works differently to cope with them, without you having to alter any settings. It's also sometimes called 'dynamic', such as 'high dynamic range' in TVs that changes brightness and contrast scene by scene.

And what kind of changing conditions would affect my laptop's power?

It depends on how hard your processor and **graphics card** are working on different tasks. For example, if you're browsing the web or writing emails, your laptop doesn't need full processing power, so Adaptive Energy Saver scales back power to the processor and graphics card to save battery. But if you start playing a game or editing videos it automatically increases power again to boost your performance. Once you've enabled Adaptive Energy Saver it'll work in the background. You don't need to turn on any other settings.

But you do if you're using the existing Energy Saver?

Yes. You'll find this by opening Settings (press Windows key+I), then clicking System followed by 'Power & battery' and opening the 'Energy saver' menu. You can then set a battery percentage at which Energy Saver will kick in (1 in our screenshot right – it's 20 per cent by default).

And what happens then?

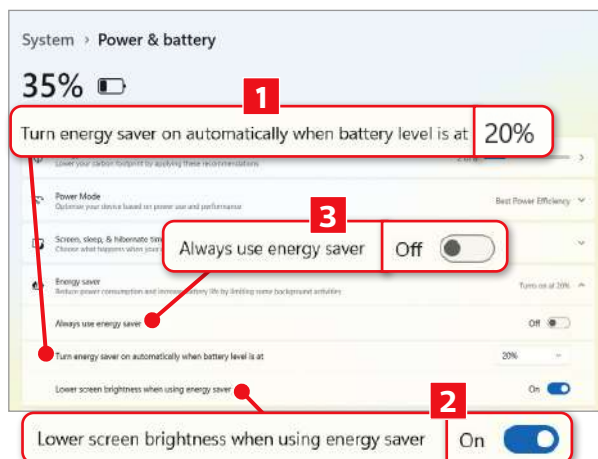
It depends whether you've turned on the 'Lower screen brightness when using energy saver' slider (2).



If so, Windows will dim your screen to preserve battery. You can see how dark this goes by also turning on the 'Always use energy saver' slider (3). It will also cut resources being used by your laptop.

What if you don't lower screen brightness?

Then Energy Saver will still aim to prolong your laptop's battery but only by reducing its resources, not by dimming its screen. This saves more battery life than dimming only. These controls are useful, but they're rather blunt – either on or off. Adaptive Energy Saver is more sophisticated, controlling your power in the background to maximise battery life. You don't need to set a battery percentage level for it to start working. Once you've turned it on, it'll work continuously.



You can control your laptop's power use in Energy Saver, but it's a crude tool

“

Adaptive Energy Saver controls your power in the background to maximise battery life

”

Can I use Adaptive Energy Saver now?

Only if you're a Windows Insider on the Canary channel, which is the earliest preview build of the operating system, where Microsoft tests its most experimental features. It was part of build 27898, released on 11 July, along with other tools like adding your own words to the Voice Access dictionary (see page 46). You'll find it in the 'Power & battery' section of Settings mentioned above. We can't see any reason why it won't be added to the full version of Windows soon.

Does it use AI to work?

No, though it responds intelligently to changing conditions just as some AI tools do. But it does this by analysing what you're doing on your laptop, not using complex AI algorithms or **machine-learning** software.

So why has it taken Microsoft so long to add it to Windows?

Because the operating system runs on a wide variety of machines with countless different hardware and **drivers**. It's been hard to find a way to control laptop power across all these setups without causing problems. There's nothing adaptive or dynamic about a crashed laptop.

50 BEST WAYS AI WILL IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

AI can do much more than answer quick questions and generate quirky images. Robert Irvine recommends 50 AI tools with practical benefits for your life in the real world

Artificial intelligence is no longer just a geeky or gimmicky technology – it's becoming integrated with our daily lives. Although not everyone welcomes this development – there are valid concerns about AI replacing human jobs, collecting our data and 'hallucinating' misleading information – AI is clearly here to stay.

Outside of the **chatbots** we tested in Issue 711's 'ChatGPT vs the Rest' Cover Feature (buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/55537), AI technology is now embedded in all kinds of websites, apps and devices. You probably use AI already without realising – for example, when extracting text from images using **OCR** or interacting with Alexa using

voice commands.

Some uses for AI are undoubtedly trivial and even cynical – as unintentionally demonstrated by the Microsoft executive who advised laid-off workers to turn to AI tools for emotional support (see page 21). But the rapidly evolving technology also has the potential to improve our lives in many meaningful ways.

In this feature, we reveal 50 of those ways, spanning a wide range of purposes and practical benefits. We've tested hundreds of AI tools to bring you the best examples of how they can transform your life and save you money, time and hassle. Some of our advice is for ChatGPT and Gemini, but we also explain how to use lots of innovative and useful new tools.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

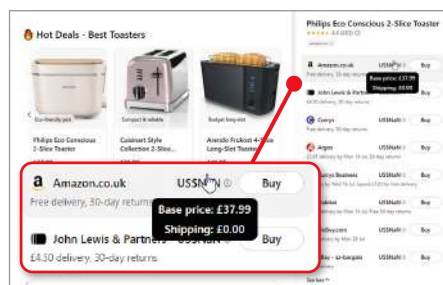
- Save money on shopping and bills
- Make all journeys faster and safer
- Improve your health and fitness
- Get assistance with your hobbies
- Create and enhance images and videos
- Upscale your TV picture and sound
- Make tedious admin tasks easier
- Manage your home more efficiently

AI TOOLS THAT SAVE YOU MONEY

1 Find the best deals when shopping online

ChatGPT now includes shopping features that recommend products and where to buy them when you enter shopping-related queries – for example ‘best deals on toasters’ or ‘Android phones under £200’. These results show a carousel of matching products and summaries of ‘top picks’.

Click a result to compare the price of the item at different online stores (see screenshot below). ChatGPT says it selects items independently and its suggestions are “not ads”.



ChatGPT now recommends the best current online deals on products

Google now uses Gemini to find you cheap products through its Shopping service (www.snipca.com/55450). Its new AI Mode more tightly integrates the two to let you perform conversational shopping searches and track price trends, to discover the best times to buy (www.snipca.com/55451). AI Mode is currently limited to the US and India, but is coming to the UK very soon.

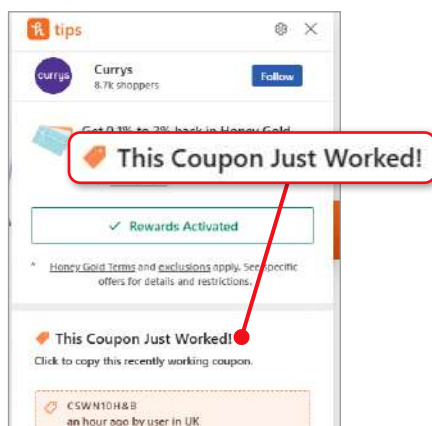
2 Save money on high-street shopping

The AI-powered Google Lens feature in the Google and Gemini apps for Android and iOS lets you take photos of products you see on the high street – or scan their barcodes – to check if you can buy them for less at another store (online or off). Its answers may also include direct links to the deals.

Amazon offers a similar AI feature called Amazon Lens in its Android and iOS apps. Tap the camera icon in the search box, then take a photo of a product, upload an image or scan a barcode. Amazon will search its store so you can see if the item (or a similar product) is cheaper there.

3 Apply discount codes automatically

PayPal's popular discount-finding tool



Honey uses AI to find and apply discount codes that work

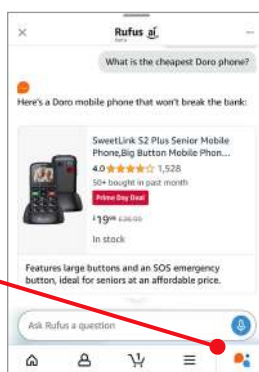
Honey (www.joinhoney.com) uses AI to find voucher codes for the site you're visiting, test if they work (see screenshot above) and apply them automatically at the checkout. It also alerts you when the price of the product you're viewing has dropped, and lets you add items to a Droplist to monitor their prices.

4 Ask Amazon for shopping advice

Amazon's app now has its own AI assistant, Rufus, which answers your shopping questions and recommends specific items for your budget. To use the chatbot, press the Rufus button in the bottom-right corner of the app – this looks like orange and blue speech bubbles (see screenshot below). Type a query into the message box, or press the microphone button to speak one, and Rufus will provide a detailed response. Select one of the follow-up questions or type one of your own. Rufus bases its responses on Amazon's product details, customer reviews and community Q&As.

Argos has also introduced an AI chatbot, Ask Trevor (based on its dinosaur mascot). It's currently only available on the Argos website – not in its mobile apps.

Tap this icon to ask Amazon's AI assistant Rufus for shopping advice



5 Get money-saving tips and news

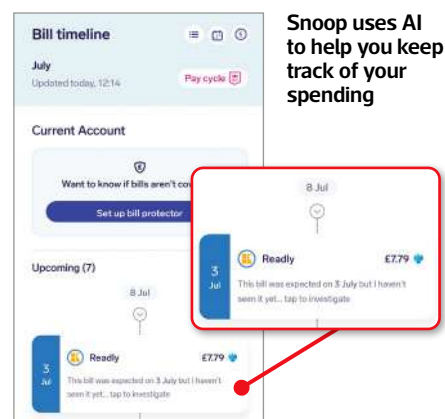
Money Saving Expert (MSE, www.moneysavingexpert.com) is an excellent source of financial advice but finding specific information in its sprawling guides sometimes takes a while. To make life easier, its mobile app now has an AI-powered ‘personal finance information chatbot’ that searches MSE's articles and news stories to answer your money-saving questions. Tap the search button in the top-right corner of the app to access ‘MSE Search (with AI)’.

6 Track and reduce your spending

The free app Snoop (Android www.snipca.com/55453; iOS www.snipca.com/55454), uses AI to help you track your spending, manage your bills, set monthly budgets and calculate how much you should save.

Connect your bank and credit-card accounts (Snoop can't see your login information) to get an overview of your finances (see screenshot below) and view money-saving deals.

Some features – such as exporting transaction data – are limited to Snoop's Plus plan, which costs £4.99 a month after a seven-day free trial.



Snoop uses AI to help you keep track of your spending

7 Boost your savings automatically

Trusting AI to take money from your bank account sounds risky, but Plum (www.snipca.com/55464) offers a smart and safe way to boost your savings. Its ‘Auto-magic’ algorithm calculates what you can set aside each week and transfers that amount to your Plum savings account or ISA. The app also uses AI to round up all your transactions to the nearest pound and adds the ‘spare change’ to your savings.

TRAVEL MORE SMOOTHLY & SAFELY

8 Discover the fastest and cheapest routes

Ask ChatGPT or Gemini the cheapest or fastest way to get from A to B, and they'll present you with a detailed breakdown of your travel options. This may include the price of coach, train and bus fares; fuel costs and toll charges if you're driving; the total distance and average journey times for each option; and extra advice such as whether to book advance tickets.

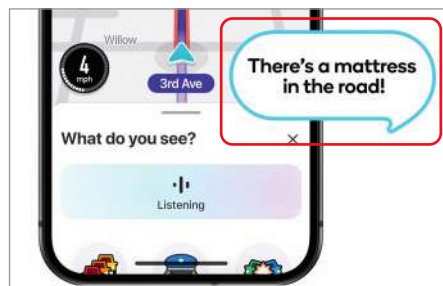
You can then ask follow-up questions about how busy and frequent public transport is likely to be; the earliest and latest times you can travel; if stations have step-free access; and anything else that's relevant to your trip.

9 Get up-to-date driving information

Google Maps and Waze (www.waze.com) combine AI with real-time data from their users to provide accurate and up-to-date driving information. They factor in, for example, if heavy traffic, road closures or bad weather will affect your journey, and suggest alternative routes.

Waze also uses AI to verify the reliability and relevance of its users' road reports. It is rolling out a Gemini-powered Conversational Reporting feature that makes it easier to submit reports using natural language (see screenshot below).

Gemini also powers the new Ask Maps feature in Google Maps, but this is currently only available in the US.



Report hazards in the road to Waze more naturally using AI

10 Avoid accidents while driving

Many new cars now come with ADAS (Advanced Driver Assistance Systems) features, which use AI to help prevent accidents. ADAS can recognise pedestrians, objects and cyclists; detect driver drowsiness and distraction; and warn you of collision risks.

If your car doesn't have ADAS built in, you can add AI features with a high-end



dashcam such as the BotsLab 4K AI-Enhanced Camera (£160 from www.snipca.com/55460, pictured above) or the Akeeyo Eyes AI Driving Assistant (£219 from www.snipca.com/55457). Alternatively, install the free app Magic Earth (www.snipca.com/55459) on your Android phone. This includes an AI Dashcam component with ADAS features that help you avoid collisions and accidents.

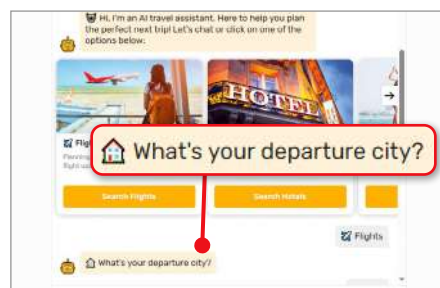
11 Claim refunds on delayed rail journeys

Trainline recently updated its iOS app (www.snipca.com/55456) with an AI assistant that answers questions about your ticket. You can ask if your train is on time, which platform it departs from and if your ticket has any restrictions.

The Trainline Assistant can even issue refunds for eligible tickets, following a simple request such as 'Can I get a refund?'. You'll find the tool in the My Tickets section of the iOS app, directly under your tickets for upcoming travel. Hopefully, it will be added to the Android version soon.

12 Find cheap flights and hotels

There are lots of AI tools for finding the best deals on flights in a conversational manner, rather than clicking boxes and calendars. We like Eddy Travels (www.eddytravels.com), a 'travel robot' you can chat to in your browser (see screenshot below) and WhatsApp.



Eddy Travels finds the best deals on flights and hotels

Tell Eddy where and when you want to fly, the number of passengers and your budget, and it will suggest suitable flight deals, which you can click to book on Skyscanner. It also finds hotel deals on Booking.com.

We also like Hopper (www.hopper.com), a mobile app that uses AI to predict the cheapest times to book flights and hotels.

13 Plan the perfect holiday

AI assistants are a great way to plan your holiday, recommending the best places to stay, eat and visit, and generating day-by-day itineraries. They can also help with booking accommodation, flights and car rental by providing links to relevant sites.

Mindtrip (www.mindtrip.ai) is a dedicated AI travel planner, which specialises in detailed itineraries that update automatically based on information you provide – including photos and links to online articles. It shows hotels, amenities and attractions on a map and recently launched an iOS app that serves as a travel companion during your trip.

14 Translate foreign languages in real time

ChatGPT has added live-speech translation to its Voice mode, but currently only for paid-for users (www.snipca.com/55468). Gemini already offers this feature in the Live mode of its mobile apps, so you can chat fluently in foreign languages while abroad.

Press the Live button, tell Gemini the languages you want to translate to and from, and speak into your phone's microphone. Gemini will speak the translation aloud, translate the other person's response and save a text version of your chat. The option is also available in Google Translate's Conversation mode (www.snipca.com/55534), which detects languages automatically (see screenshot below).



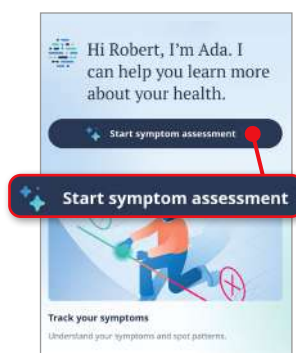
Google Translate's AI helps you chat in foreign languages

IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH & FITNESS

15 Get advice about health worries

Although no AI tool is a substitute for a professional medical diagnosis, they can answer questions about your health worries. As well as asking ChatGPT and Gemini for general advice, you can use Ada Health for Android and iOS (www.snipca.com/55470) to check your symptoms more precisely than NHS checkers.

Tap 'Start symptom assessment' (see screenshot below) then answer the chatbot's questions about the nature, severity and duration of your symptoms.



Ada Health suggests possible causes for symptoms

Ada will then generate a report suggesting possible causes, which you can share with your GP.

Alternatively, try Symptoma (www.symptoma.co.uk), which works in your browser.

16 Lose weight by eating more healthily

There are lots of apps that help you lose weight by using AI to monitor what you eat and generate healthy meal plans. Most have expensive monthly subscriptions, but Lifesum (www.snipca.com/55473) is arguably the best **freemium** option.

Log your meals by describing their

contents or scanning barcodes of food packaging, and Lifesum's AI will count the calories, carbs, protein and fat – as well as the calories you burn through exercise. It tracks your progress over time and suggests ways to eat more healthily – though you need to pay £8 a month for a subscription to unlock its meal plans.

17 Monitor your heart rate and breathing

Smart rings such as the Oura Ring (www.snipca.com/55472, pictured below) use AI to monitor your health by collecting and analysing **biometric** data. This includes your heart rate and variability,



Smart rings use AI to monitor your heart rate

body temperature and breathing patterns during sleep.

Oura gives you a Sleep Score and Readiness Score every morning, offering personalised insights into your health and daily guidance. Smart rings are lighter and more comfortable than smartwatches, though the best ones cost from £200.

18 Walk further and faster every day

Avoid expensive AI-powered fitness apps by using the free Google Fit (www.snipca.com/55474) to count your steps and the energy you expend every day. The app uses sensors on your phone and AI algorithms to automatically detect and log activities including walking, running and cycling.

It awards you daily 'heart points' for

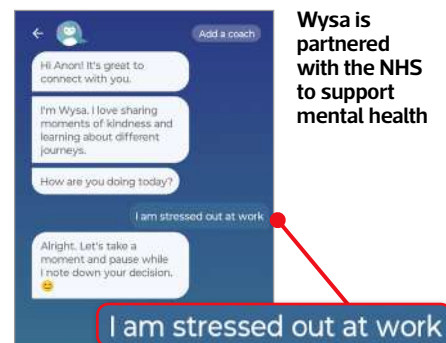
moderate to intense physical activity, such as walking briskly (along with counting your 'move minutes') and sets you a target of 150 points per week.

On some phones, Google Fit can measure your heart and respiratory rates using AI and your device's camera – if available, you'll find these options at the bottom of the Home screen.

19 Get help with your mental health

AI can also assist with your mental health, though again it's no substitute for professional help. Wysa (www.snipca.com/55476), which is partnered with healthcare organisations including the NHS, uses AI to provide mental-health support.

Its penguin chatbot listens without judgement and offers advice on problems such as stress (see screenshot below), improving sleep and coping with difficult emotions. Wysa's responses are based on data from clinical experts, and all your conversations are kept confidential. It's free to use, but its library of self-care exercises costs £12 a month after a seven-day trial.



Wysa is partnered with the NHS to support mental health

I am stressed out at work

GET HELP WITH HOBBIES & INTERESTS

20 Identify plants and trees

ChatGPT and Gemini are good at identifying plants from photos, and searching the web for more information (see page 43), but avid gardeners may prefer a specialist AI app. PlantNet (www.snipca.com/55477) is our favourite because it's completely free (and ad-free), with no features restricted to a premium version.

It combines the latest AI technology with its vast community of users to

identify over 20,000 species of plants (see screenshot below left) and trees from their leaves, flowers, fruit or bark. Its AI model is regularly retrained using new observations and community revisions.



PlantNet identifies plant and tree species using AI

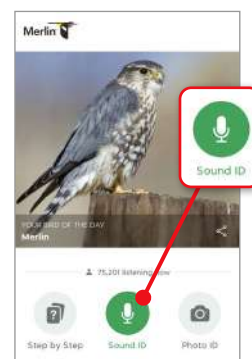
21 Identify birds from their songs

Merlin Bird ID (www.snipca.com/55479) is an essential free app for twitchers that makes ingenious use of AI. It identifies birds through recordings you share of their songs (see screenshot right), transforming

the audio into visual representations called spectrograms. It can even distinguish multiple birds singing at once

The app also uses AI to identify birds from photos, covering more than 8,000 species and drawing on the massive eBird database of bird sightings.

Merlin ID uses AI to identify birds from their songs



22 Identify stamps from around the world

Stamp Identifier for Android (www.snipca.com/55485) and iOS (www.snipca.com/55486) uses AI-powered image recognition to identify any stamp from anywhere in the world. Using data from the Colnect Collectors Community, the app tells you the stamp's country of origin, issue date, print-run size and other useful information, and provides catalogue codes so you can check its current value.

23 Identify and catalogue coins

Numismatists (coin collectors) can use 'AI coin expert' CoinSnap (www.snipca.com/55487) to identify unfamiliar coins and discover their value. Upload a photo and CoinSnap's image-recognition will tell you where it comes from, its mintage and its approximate worth. You can then tap to add it to your collection (see screenshot right).

CoinSnap also has an AI-powered grading feature,



Use CoinSnap's AI to identify and catalogue coins

but this is only available with a Premium subscription, which costs £5.99 a month. Decline the option to upgrade by tapping the 'x' in the top-right corner.

24 Get help with genealogy research

Genealogy websites such as Ancestry and FamilySearch use AI to digitise, transcribe and index old documents, allowing users to easily understand handwritten records. But AI assistants can also help you research your family history.

You can ask ChatGPT and Gemini for advice when you hit a dead end, such as the types of records you should be looking for and where; request historical details for a particular time and place; and even get them to generate a research plan. They can also summarise transcriptions of long documents such as wills, and explain archaic data in censuses.

The custom GPT model Ancestry Explorer (www.snipca.com/55488) is designed for this purpose and lets you upload GEDCOM files for analysis.

25 Find recipes for any ingredient

There are hundreds of AI-powered cooking apps, but most charge a monthly subscription. One of the best totally free options is SuperCook for Android (www.snipca.com/55482) and iOS (www.snipca.com/55483).

Add a few ingredients based on what you have available, either by selecting or dictating them, and it will use AI to find matching recipes (see screenshot below). If you're missing one ingredient, SuperCook adds it to your shopping list to buy later.

You may not even need a cooking app because ChatGPT and Gemini generate easy-to-follow recipes, tailor them to your taste and needs, and answer your follow-up questions. There are also custom GPTs for culinary ideas and advice, such as this one: www.snipca.com/55484.



SuperCook's AI finds recipes for available ingredients

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CREATE & ENHANCE PHOTOS & VIDEOS

26 Generate images for personal projects

The image-generation feature in AI chatbots offers a speedy free way to conjure up pictures for personal projects, such as custom greeting cards, posters, CD covers and websites. It saves you money on purchasing stock photos, and means you won't breach anyone's copyright by reusing pictures you find online.

We think Gemini's images are slightly better quality than ChatGPT's, plus there's no daily limit, but for the very best results try Google's ImageFX (www.snipca.com/55515). This free online tool produces amazingly realistic pictures you can enhance using filters such as 35mm (see screenshot below) and download for free in high resolution.



ImageFX creates photorealistic photos from text prompts

27 Edit images using natural language

As well as generating images, ChatGPT can now edit existing pictures. This includes adding and removing elements, applying different styles and adjustments, and even changing facial expressions.

Using natural language to request these edits is much easier than fiddling around with layers and advanced options in image-editing software. Gemini also offers image editing but not yet to free users in the UK.

28 Fix problems with old photos

There are lots of AI tools for fixing old photos, but the most impressive we've seen is Reimagine from MyHeritage (www.snipca.com/55516). This lets you colourise (see screenshot above right), repair, enhance and animate photos, which you can scan directly in the app or upload from your collection.

The results are brilliant and you can try all the app's features for free before committing to a subscription (£8 a month or £50 a year). MyHeritage also offers separate versions of Reimagine's tools on



Reimagine is an AI toolkit for enhancing old photos

its website (www.snipca.com/55518).

29 Create short videos on any subject

OpenAI's video generator Sora (www.snipca.com/55517) is now available in the UK, but only with a paid-for ChatGPT plan. As we explained in Issue 712 (page 49), you can try Sora for free by installing Microsoft's Bing Search app (www.snipca.com/55068).

This generates five-second videos from text prompts, which you can download in GIF format. You can create 10 clips for free using 'Fast mode' and an unlimited number in the slower Standard mode.

ENHANCE YOUR ENTERTAINMENT

30 Get personalised TV recommendations

All the main TV-streaming services use **machine learning** to recommend series and films to watch. These personalised suggestions are based on what you've searched for, viewed and 'liked', and what other users with similar tastes have watched.

We'll soon see more AI features on many services. Netflix is testing 'generative AI search', which lets you find shows and movies using conversational phrases (www.snipca.com/55519); Prime Video is rolling out an AI Topics feature that suggests shows for your perceived interests (www.snipca.com/55520); and BBC iPlayer is running several AI experiments (www.snipca.com/55521).

31 Upscale your TV's picture and sound

Samsung's latest smart TVs include its new Vision AI technology (www.snipca.com/55527), which **upscales** picture quality to near **8K**-resolution on compatible sets. It adjusts brightness, contrast, colour and sharpness based on



Samsung's latest TVs – like the 43in QLED Q7F 4K – include a host of AI features

what's on screen and the lighting conditions in your living room, and also upscales the sound quality.

Vision AI offers many other benefits, including live translation and pop-up information about what you're watching. The cheapest Samsung TV with the technology is the 43in QLED Q7F 4K (pictured above), which costs £519 (www.snipca.com/55559).

32 Create instant themed playlists

Spotify has a feature called AI Playlists (for Premium users only), which generates playlists based on text prompts. Tap 'Create'

then AI Playlist and describe what you want to hear, such as 'songs about walking in the countryside'. Spotify will generate a playlist of relevant tracks, which you can refine using additional prompts before tapping Create.

It also has an AI DJ feature (again Premium only), which involves an AI host introducing selected songs, like a virtual radio show. To access this tap Search, then Made For You and choose DJ.

33 Compose your own music

ChatGPT and Gemini can't yet generate music, but there are lots of AI tools that can. Riffusion (www.riffusion.com) is particularly impressive, because it lets you create an unlimited number of good-quality songs for free (after creating an account) simply by entering a text prompt. These can be instrumental or use auto-generated lyrics.

If you want to write your own words, try Udio (www.udio.com). Although its free plan limits you to creating three songs per day, you can add your own lyrics and specify a 'vibe'.

MAKE TEDIOUS TASKS MUCH EASIER

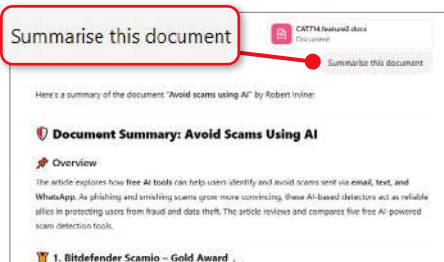
34 Write complaint letters to companies

AI assistants are ideal for writing complaint and dispute emails and letters to companies, in a formal tone you wouldn't normally use. Just tell them the nature of the complaint and the action you require, to generate an instant draft.

They're equally useful for friendlier correspondence, such as thank-you notes, recommendations and apologies. Ask the chatbot to adjust its tone as required.

35 Summarise complex documents

Save yourself the tedium of reading every word of a long, complex document, such as a contract, report or proposal, by asking ChatGPT or Gemini to summarise the key points for you. Upload the file, enter the prompt 'Summarise this document' (see screenshot below) and the chatbot will provide an overview and bullet-pointed breakdown of the contents. Double-check any details you're unsure about.



Ask an AI assistant to summarise long documents for you

36 Convert text into spreadsheets

ChatGPT is particularly good at extracting data from documents and placing it in another format, such as a table or spreadsheet – a task that typically takes ages and requires high levels of concentration when done manually. Simply upload a file, specify the format you want to convert it to and ChatGPT will do the rest.

Its spreadsheets automatically organise data into logical columns and rows, and it can even create formulas for Excel and Google Sheets.

37 Create your own calculator

Gemini's brilliant Canvas feature offers an easy way to create your own calculators, for everything from mortgages and savings to BMI and unit

conversion. Simply ask Gemini to create an interactive calculator for your desired purpose, and it will generate the code in Canvas and present you with the result

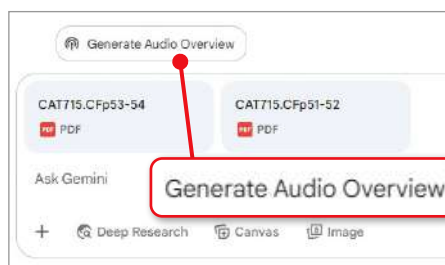
38 Transcribe conversations and meetings

Keep a record of online and real-world conversations and meetings by using Otter.ai (www.snipca.com/55528) to transcribe them for you. Its free plan lets you transcribe 300 minutes of voice calls, video calls and spoken chats per month (maximum of 30 minutes each), through the Otter.ai mobile apps and Chrome extension. The AI automatically detects individual speakers and summarises conversations.

39 Digest information from AI-generated podcasts

Gemini's Audio Overview feature creates podcast-style conversations from sources you provide, in which two human-sounding voices discuss the content. It's handy for digesting information in a natural manner while you get on with other things.

Upload documents and PDFs to the Gemini website or mobile app and it should offer to generate an Audio Overview (see screenshot below) – if not, type that prompt.



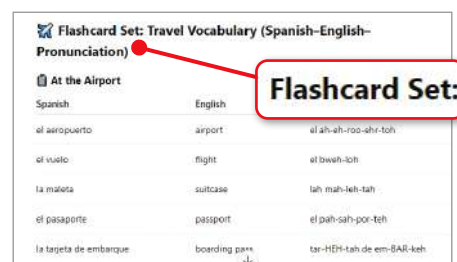
Audio Overview creates podcasts from your files and documents

40 Practise job interviews

AI assistants can not only suggest the type of questions you might encounter at a job interview, but help you prepare by conducting a mock interview with you. Provide details of the role you're applying for, the type of interview and the areas you want to focus on, and the chatbot will ask appropriate questions and help you refine your answers.

41 Learn a new language

As well as translating foreign text and speech, chatbots can help you learn a new language or hone your existing



AI assistants can help you master a foreign language

skills. Specify which language you want to master and the AI assistant will help you build your vocabulary and learn common phrases through word lists, flashcards (see screenshot above) and quizzes. You can practise conversations in text chat or voice mode.

42 Create a smart calendar

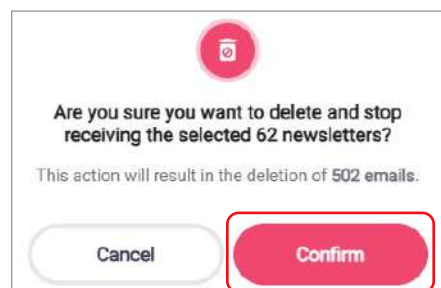
Reclaim.ai (www.snipca.com/55533) integrates with Google Calendar or Outlook Calendar, and uses AI to analyse your schedule and habits. It then helps you plan your life by choosing the best times and days for future events, so – for example – you don't commit to appointments when you're usually having lunch.

Owned by Dropbox, Reclaim.ai has a 'forever free' plan, which includes most of the smart calendar's features.

43 Clean up your email inbox

Cleanfox (www.snipca.com/55531) uses AI to clean up your email inbox. Available online and as a mobile app, it scans your inbox for newsletters and marketing emails, then deletes these junk messages and unsubscribes you from their mailing lists with a single click or tap (see screenshot below).

Cleanfox works with Gmail, Outlook, Yahoo Mail and most other email services. Unlike rival tools, it's completely free but collects data about what you buy online.



Cleanfox uses AI to detect, delete and unsubscribe you from junk emails

MANAGE YOUR HOME MORE EFFICIENTLY

44 Reduce your energy bills

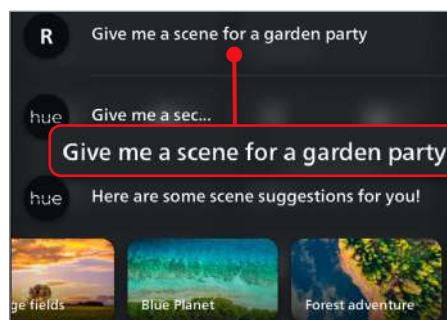
Smart thermostats such as Nest, Ecobee and Tado devices use AI to create personalised schedules based on when you typically leave the house and return home, and your preferred temperature at different times of day. They also use sensors to detect motion, and analyse local weather forecasts to adjust their temperatures accordingly.

This automated control helps reduce your energy bills by ensuring you don't waste money on heating empty rooms, or overheating occupied ones. Sadly, Google's fourth-generation Nest Learning Thermostat, which offers additional AI functions, is still unavailable in the UK a year after its US launch (www.snipca.com/55503).

45 Set lighting moods

Smart-lighting systems use AI – in addition to voice commands – to control the lights in your home and garden. This includes applying **adaptive brightness**, learning your lighting routines, optimising energy usage and reacting to sensors.

The Philips Hue app for its smart lights has just been updated (www.snipca.com/55502) with an AI assistant that lets you describe the type of lighting effect you want to see or mood you want to set (see screenshot below). The app will suggest something from its gallery of presets, or create something new to match your text or voice prompt.



The Philips Hue app lets you describe the mood you want to create with your lighting

46 Clean your house robotically

Basic robot vacuum cleaners use sensors to navigate your floors and change direction when they bump into objects, but more advanced models offer more thorough cleaning through AI. They create detailed maps of your home to plan the most efficient cleaning routes – room by room – and avoid obstacles automatically.

Some models, such as the iRobot Roomba j7 (£599 from www.snipca.com/55506, pictured below), use image-recognition to identify objects including cables, shoes, socks and even pet waste.



The iRobot Roomba j7 uses AI to detect objects

47 Improve your home security

As we explained in our 'Who's at your door?' Cover Feature in Issue 707 (buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/55504), smart doorbells and home-security cameras make extensive use of AI. This includes detecting people, vehicles and animals, and differentiating between known individuals and intruders, so they can alert you to suspicious activity.

Ring and Eufy video doorbells use AI to notify you when a package is delivered or taken, while some security cameras – including TP-Link Tapo devices – recognise abnormal sounds such as glass breaking and dogs barking. See our feature on page 60 for advice on keeping your security cameras safe.

48 Ask for help with home repairs

ChatGPT and Gemini are invaluable sources of advice for home improvements and repairs. Ask about anything from

putting up shelves to fixing a washing machine, and they'll provide step-by-step instructions, details of the parts and tools you need, and advice about when you should consult a professional.

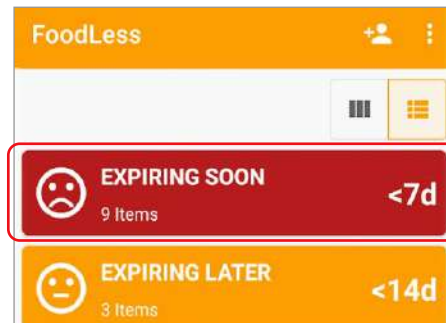
There's even a custom GPT called Expert DIY Assistant (www.snipca.com/55507) that provides comprehensive guides to improving your home.

49 Identify mystery objects

If you're baffled by a mysterious object you've found in a drawer or cupboard, or are unsure which screw to use for a DIY project, upload a photo to ChatGPT or Gemini – or scan it with Google Lens. They'll identify it in seconds and look up more information online.

50 Reduce food waste

Samsung's high-end smart fridges have a feature called AI Vision Inside, which analyses fresh items you put in and take out, and notifies you when they're about to go off. This helps prevent food waste, but the fridges also cost thousands of pounds.



FoodLess uses AI to track food expiry dates

A cheaper if less sophisticated option is the free Android app FoodLess (www.snipca.com/55512), which scans the barcodes and use-by dates of food you put in your fridge or cupboard, then keeps track of when they're about to expire (see screenshot above). It sources information from the Open Food Facts database (www.snipca.com/55546). **ca**

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Computer active
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Stop hackers spying on your security camera

Is your security camera being used as a back door for hackers? Jonathan Parkyn explains what you must do to stop criminals hijacking your footage



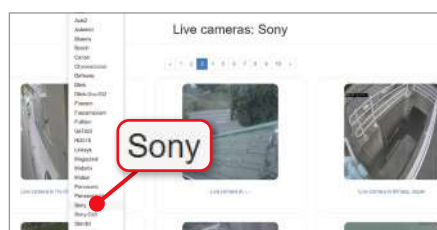
The smart-home boom has flooded the market with security cameras, doorbells, baby monitors and more – all promising to keep you safer. But if you don't check their settings, these devices could instead be putting you at risk.

Weak security and poor privacy practices can give hackers access to your cameras over the internet, letting them spy on you or steal footage – and even use them to plan a burglary. Worse still, poorly secured cameras can expose passwords and private data, or let hackers into your entire Wi-Fi network.

This isn't idle scaremongering. A recent report from US research firm Bitsight (www.snipca.com/55498) found more than 40,000 internet-connected cameras around the world streaming live without passwords or protection. They were broadcasting footage of people's homes, gardens and driveways to anyone online. Bitsight says that number is likely to be the tip of the iceberg. But you can close these security gaps and stop your cameras being used against you. Here's what to do.

Check whether your camera is visible online

As Bitsight's research shows, many so-called security cameras offer little real protection, with footage viewable by anyone with an internet connection – no hacking required. You'll see this by visiting Insecam (<http://insecam.org>),



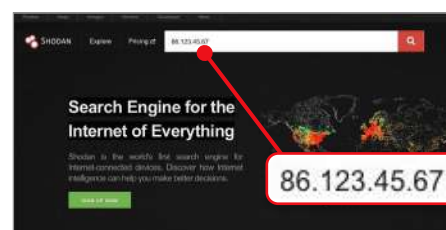
Insecam shows live footage of cameras that don't need a password

which shows unsecured video feeds from cameras worldwide. You can search by location or camera manufacturer (see screenshot above).

Bear in mind, Insecam operates in a legal and ethical grey area, showing unsecured video feeds without consent. Watching these may infringe privacy and we don't endorse it. Recording and sharing the footage would break the law.

More reputable is Shodan (www.shodan.io), a search engine for internet-connected devices, including cameras that can be watched online without typing a password. Basic searches are free, so there's no need to pay for a premium account. Type your camera's make and model into the search box to see if it appears. If it does, your camera could be vulnerable.

You can also search Shodan using your public IP address (see screenshot above right). However, if your IP appears, don't automatically assume you're at risk – some results, like open ports, don't necessarily represent a security problem. However, if you find entries related to



Search for your IP address on Shodan and check if your security camera is at risk

cameras that show unsecured access or default passwords, your cameras are vulnerable. This means anyone can watch, record or hijack them. You must change passwords, update **firmware** and close any open ports immediately. Find your IP address at <https://whatismyipaddress.com>.

Change the default password

Many security cameras come with default usernames and passwords for accessing their admin interface. If you don't change these, you might as well leave your front door wide open. Databases of default login details are readily available online, and hackers use automated tools to scan for devices still using them. That means your camera could be discovered and taken over within seconds by any hacker worth their salt.

As soon as you set up a new camera (or if you've never changed an existing camera's login), open its app, enter the device settings and change the password to something strong and unique – better yet, get a password manager like

Bitwarden (www.bitwarden.com) to generate and store a secure password for you. If possible, change the username to something unique too.

Disable remote access unless you really need it

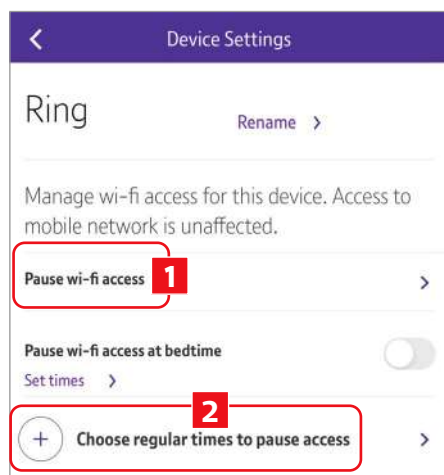
Many security cameras let you view and manage their live feed remotely. This can be very handy, letting you keep an eye on your home from work or anywhere else. But it also greatly increases the risk of hackers gaining access. This is because your camera is reachable on the internet, not just over your local Wi-Fi network. Even if you've taken all the necessary security precautions, there's still a slim chance a hacker could get hold of a way to access your device – such as via a data breach, for example.

If you don't use or need remote access, we recommend switching it off altogether. If you do use it, then we'd suggest only enabling it when you need it, such as when you're on holiday.

Most security cameras let you enable or disable remote access or control via their app or settings. If yours doesn't, you can often block the camera's internet access temporarily via your router. For example, BT/EE Smart Hub owners can do this through the My BT or EE app. Log in, tap More, then select 'Your wi-fi network'. Tap 'Control wi-fi access for your devices', then find your camera in the list and tap it.

From there, tap 'Pause wi-fi access' (1 in our screenshot below) to disable remote access manually as needed, or 'Choose regular times to pause access' (2) to set a schedule. Bear in mind that pausing Wi-Fi access means you won't be able to access the camera at all – even locally on your network.

If you really do need remote access,

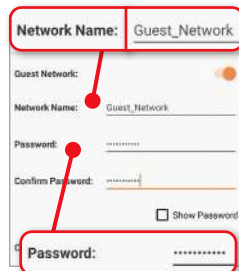


Pause Wi-Fi access to disable remote access or set a schedule for turning access on and off

Put cameras on a 'guest' Wi-Fi network

Isolating your security camera on a guest Wi-Fi network is a smart way to reduce risk. It means that if hackers hijack the camera, they can't use it as a gateway to your laptop, phone or other devices on your main network. You can usually set up a guest network by logging into your router's app or browser settings (see screenshot).

Not all routers support guest networks – BT's Smart Hub 2 doesn't, for example.



If yours doesn't, consider adding a second wireless access point. This creates a separate Wi-Fi network just for smart devices like cameras, doorbells and plugs. One way is to connect a cheap second router to your main router via Ethernet, then set it up with its own network name (SSID) and password. You may also need to put the second router in access point or bridge mode to avoid network conflicts.

we'd advise ramping up your security to the max by using a very secure password (see previous tip) and enabling two-factor authentication (2FA), wherever available.

Turn off cloud recording

Cloud recording is a common feature on many security cameras. It lets you view motion-triggered footage when you're away from home. But like remote access, it means your camera uploads video over the internet, giving hackers a potential way to intercept your footage.

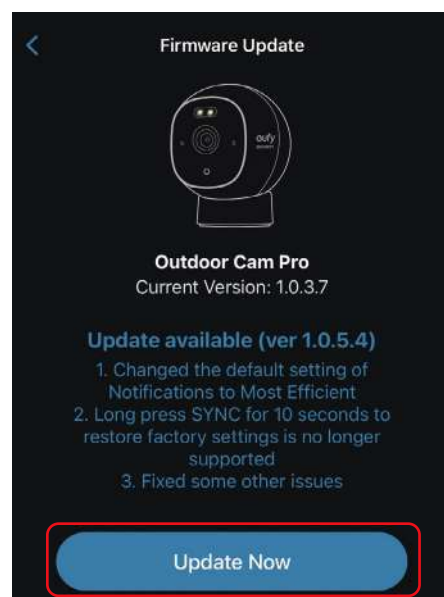
Worse, it's often unclear where or how securely your recordings are stored. What if the company's servers are in a country with weak privacy laws? Or what if your footage isn't encrypted properly? In 2021, for example, a software bug in an update exposed hundreds of recorded videos from users of the Chinese brand Eufy.

You should be able to check whether cloud recording is enabled and turn it off via your camera's app or settings. However, some models, including many from Arlo, don't let you switch it off. Other cameras may let you record locally, usually to an SD card, which is often preferable because it keeps your footage off the internet and out of the reach of hackers.

If you want to watch recordings via the cloud, stick with reputable brands that are clear about how and where they store your footage – Ring, TP-Link, Arlo and Google Nest, for example – rather than cheap, unbranded devices. Even then, read the privacy policy to see which data they collect, how long they keep it and whether they share it with third parties.

Keep your firmware up to date

Like your phone or laptop, security cameras run on firmware, and so need regular updates to fix bugs, add features and – most importantly – patch security



Check whether your security camera updates automatically or requires you to do it manually

flaws that hackers can exploit. If you don't keep it updated, you could be leaving your camera open to known attacks. Check your camera's app or settings to see if it updates automatically (most newer models do) or if you need to install updates manually (see screenshot above).

Before buying a new camera, check how long the manufacturer promises to provide security updates. Ring, for example, says its cameras get updates for at least four years after they stop being available (www.snipca.com/55499). Some companies only commit to a year or two, meaning older models can become unsafe without you realising.

If your camera hasn't received updates in years or is no longer supported, that's a red flag – especially if it has known security flaws. Try searching your camera's make and model online with terms like 'exploit' or 'breach' to see if any problems have been reported. **ca**



BLOCK THE MOST ANNOYING ADS EVER

Just as you thought online ads couldn't get any worse, they start filling your whole screen. Robert Irvine explains why you're seeing these ads and how to block them

If you've recently had your browsing interrupted by ads that fill your entire screen and stop you accessing web pages, you're not alone. In the past year or so, we've noticed a huge increase in these nuisances – known as 'vignette ads' – and frankly we're tired of them.

Here, we explain how to block these irritating adverts for good in both your desktop and mobile browsers.

What are vignette ads?

Vignette ads are full-screen 'interstitial' adverts, which appear when you navigate from one page to another on a website or in an app. They're shown before a new page loads, just after you click or tap a link to open it, and sometimes when you return to a page you were previously viewing.

Also referred to as 'page transition ads', vignette ads are most commonly seen on mobile sites – especially those of newspapers – but are increasingly popping up on desktop sites too. Most are

displayed by Google AdSense through its Auto Ads feature (www.snipca.com/55554), but other advertising networks are now following this awful trend.

Vignette ads usually consist of an ad on a translucent or dark background, which fills your screen or browser and obscures the content behind (see screenshot below left). They either have a countdown timer or can be dismissed manually by clicking the 'X' or Close button. However, you may have to wait several seconds before this option appears, and it's likely to be (purposefully) hard to spot.

Why are we seeing more of them?

Because vignette ads are full screen and appear between page loads, they command more attention than traditional banner ads. This means you're more likely to click or tap them – whether intentionally or accidentally – which produces more advertising revenue for the site.

Another advantage is that interstitial ads appear as overlays, so they don't require space to be made for them in website layouts. The fact they can't be ignored means advertisers are willing to pay more for them, which again boosts a site's ad revenue.

Can't sites make them less annoying?

Google AdSense lets website owners choose whether to show vignette ads on

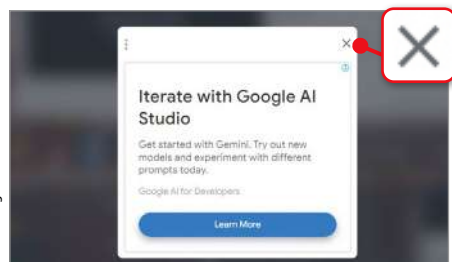
Website owners control how frequently visitors see vignette ads

their sites and how often they appear. The default is every 10 minutes (1 in our screenshot above), which means you'll only see one interstitial ad while browsing the site for that length of time, regardless of how many pages you view. However, less scrupulous webmasters can opt to display vignette ads as frequently as once a minute.

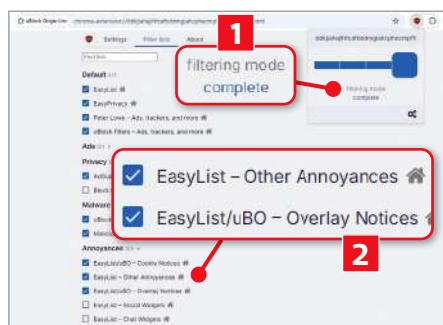
Site owners can also choose to only allow vignette ads on smaller screens, so visitors don't see them in their desktop browsers. But the more devices the ads appear on, the higher the potential advertising revenue, so many sites don't bother to opt out 2.

HOW TO BLOCK VIGNETTE ADS Install an ad blocker in your browser

Although Google's Manifest V3 (MV3) rules have killed off the Chrome version



Vignette ads fill your whole screen and obscure the page behind



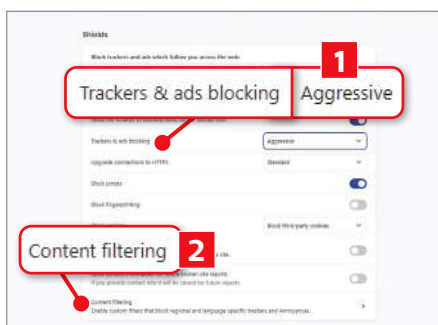
Tweak uBlock Origin Lite's settings to block more interstitial ads

of popular content blocker uBlock Origin (www.snipca.com/55558), it remains available for other Chromium browsers and Firefox, and blocks all ads automatically – including interstitial ones. Its successor, uBlock Origin Lite (www.snipca.com/55555), also blocks vignette ads, though some ads displayed directly by websites – rather than ad networks – may still appear. We haven't seen many since installing the extension.

To ensure you block as many vignette ads as possible, click uBlock Origin Lite's toolbar button and set its 'filtering mode' to 'complete' (1 in our screenshot above). Next, click the three-cog 'Open the dashboard' icon then the 'Filter lists' tab. Select the filters 'EasyList – Other Annoyances' and 'EasyList/uBO – Overlay Notices' 2, and make sure all the Default filters are enabled.

Switch to an ad-blocking browser

If you don't want to install an ad-blocking extension, consider switching from Chrome, Edge or Firefox to Brave (www.brave.com). This privacy-focused browser offers two-pronged protection against interstitial ads (and all the other types) through its Shields feature and content filters.



Combine Brave's Aggressive mode with a filter to block vignette ads

For the best results, set Shields to Aggressive mode, though be warned this may stop some sites loading properly (you can disable Shields temporarily if that happens). Click Brave's three-line menu button and choose Settings then Shields. Click the dropdown menu next to 'Trackers & ads blocking' and select Aggressive (1 in our screenshot above).

Additionally, enable Brave's filter for blocking online annoyances, including many interstitial ads. Click 'Content filtering' 2 and tick 'Fanboy's Annoyances' and 'uBO Annoyances'.

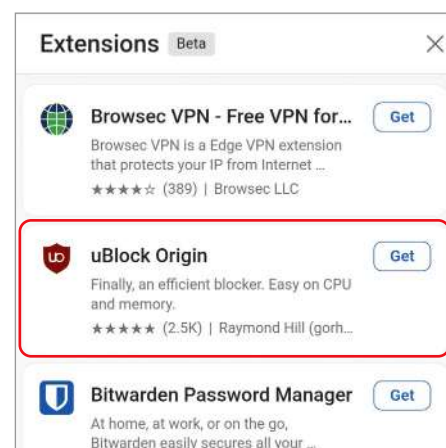
Block scripts that show vignette ads

Most vignette ads are displayed using **JavaScript**, so you can potentially avoid them by blocking **scripts** in your browser. This is one feature uBlock Origin Lite lacks compared with its predecessor, thanks to Google's new MV3 rules.

Brave offers the option through its Shields page – just switch on the 'Block scripts' setting. In other browsers that still support uBlock Origin, you can use that extension to block scripts. Open its dashboard and select Disable JavaScript on the Settings tab.

In Chrome, go to Settings then 'Privacy and security' and click 'Site settings'. Select 'JavaScript' and choose 'Don't allow sites to use JavaScript'.

Be warned that many sites rely on JavaScript, so disabling it altogether will outweigh the benefits of blocking vignette ads. A more convenient solution is to install the Chromium extension 'Javascript disable Chrome' (www.snipca.com/55562). This lets you switch JavaScript off or on by clicking its toolbar button, so you can enable it on sites that need to run scripts and disable it on those with interstitial ads.



Edge for Android now supports extensions including uBlock Origin

Block vignette ads on your phone

It's much more difficult to block vignette ads on your phone or tablet, where they're displayed directly by websites and apps, and you can't install an ad-blocking extension – at least not in Chrome.

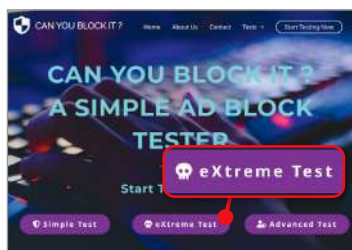
Brave for Android (www.snipca.com/55564) offers the same ad-blocking features as the desktop browser, which means it can block vignette ads on your mobile device – especially with Shields set to Aggressive mode. The iOS app (www.snipca.com/55565) blocks some interstitial ads, but Apple's restrictions on content blockers limit its effectiveness.

Firefox for Android (www.snipca.com/55566) lets you install uBlock Origin to block vignette ads on your small screen. And earlier this year, Edge for Android (www.snipca.com/55567) introduced support for extensions, including uBlock Origin (see screenshot above).

If you use Safari on your iPhone or iPad, you can boost the browser's protection against interstitial and other ads by installing AdGuard (www.snipca.com/55568). It won't block them all (again due to Apple's restrictions), but it's better than using Safari alone. **ca**

Does your browser block vignette ads?

To confirm your browser will block vignette ads after following our advice in this feature, visit Can You Block It (www.snipca.com/55569). This offers three tests for ad blockers to



ensure they're working as intended, with specific reference to interstitial ads.

Click the 'eXtreme Test' button (see screenshot) and Can You Block It will load a page "full of the scummiest adverts out there". If you don't see any of these

– the site tells you what to look for – your ad blocker or private browser is doing its job. Click 'Start Testing Now' to trigger an interstitial ad – if this is just a blank page or doesn't open, then it's

being blocked. Note that this doesn't mean you're protected against *all* vignette ads, especially those shown directly by sites. Can You Block It hasn't been updated for a few years, and Google AdSense is getting better at beating ad blockers.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Will a BIOS update encrypt my data?

Q I installed a graphics driver using the new Nvidia app recently, but afterwards I noticed that Windows wasn't recognising my 5Gbps USB-A ports. The 10Gbps USB-A ports are working.

I'd restored Windows from a backup before updating the driver, so I rolled back to the previous driver but to no avail. Then I tried updating the BIOS on my Asus TUF Gaming Z790-Pro Wi-Fi motherboard, but a message appeared telling me to save the BitLocker key and disable drive encryption. The only options were Yes or No, so I cancelled the update.

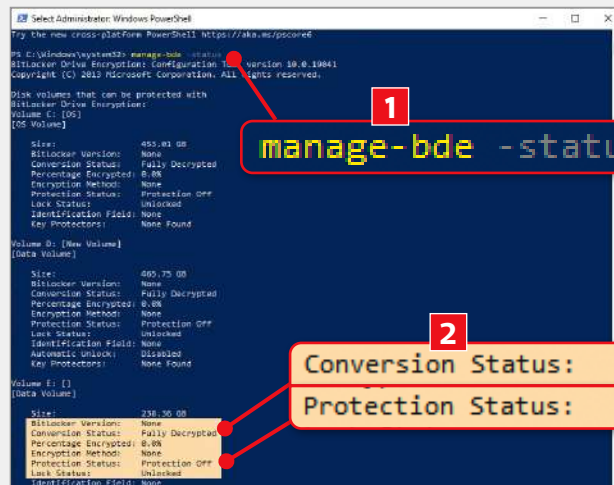
The vendor who installed the motherboard didn't mention anything about a BitLocker key, and I've searched through Windows settings, drive properties and my Windows account but can't find any reference to a BitLocker key or drive encryption. Also there is no lock symbol beside any of the drive letters.

While I'm almost certain BitLocker isn't active, I'd like some reassurance that it's OK to click No on the message. Clicking Yes would take me into uncharted waters.

John Harris

A You're wise to be cautious when faced with any warning message relating to BitLocker, because making the wrong decision could be catastrophic if you don't have a record of the BitLocker key. However, while we must be equally cautious in our reply, we think the warning you saw is a generic one, although it's certainly confusing.

We think the motherboard is simply warning you that there is a risk involved in updating the BIOS, because something could go wrong. As such, we think this message is advising you to back up any BitLocker recovery keys and disable BitLocker encryption if it's enabled on any drives. That 'if' is



Use the Windows Terminal to check whether your drives are encrypted

crucial, because if you're not using BitLocker on your PC, and you therefore don't have any logged BitLocker keys, there's nothing to worry about.

In other words, we think this is simply the motherboard displaying a generic warning in case BitLocker is enabled. It's poorly worded, however, and presenting it as a Yes/No question doesn't help. That's because we think this message is really asking for you to confirm that you've disabled BitLocker (if you're using it) and backed up the keys (if they exist). As you're not using BitLocker, you don't have to disable it or back up the keys, because there are no keys to back up.

Clicking 'No' on the message you saw will probably stop the installation process

because the prompt is really asking if you're ready to proceed with the BIOS update. Reply 'No' and the motherboard will assume you're not ready to proceed, returning you to the BIOS page. Counterintuitively, you actually need to click 'Yes', indicating that you're ready to proceed – even though you haven't disabled BitLocker or backed up the non-existent keys.

Just to be certain, we'd advise you to use the little-known Manage BitLocker Drive Encryption command-line tool to check that BitLocker is definitely not enabled on any of your drives. To do this in Windows, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then choose 'Terminal (Admin)'. Now type `manage-bde -status` (1 in our screenshot above) and press Enter to see a list of every drive and whether or not BitLocker is enabled – the status entry for each should say 'Fully Decrypted' and 'Protection Off' (2). If that's the case, you can update the BIOS without any further problems.

We don't know for sure if a BIOS update will fix the problem with your 5Gbps USB ports but, if not, visit the Asus support site for your board at www.snipca.com/55213 and download and install the latest Intel chipset and USB drivers (see screenshot left).



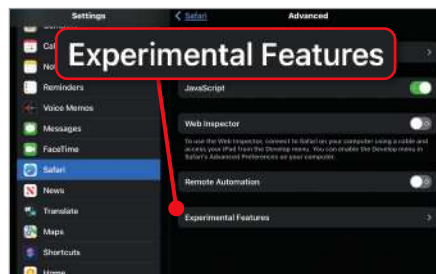
Download drivers for your motherboard from the manufacturer's website – Asus in this case

Is my iPad too old for modern websites?

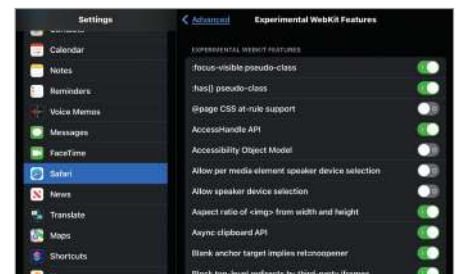
Q I have an old iPad, stuck on iOS 12.5.7, which I've been very happy with until recently. I use it mainly for everyday online tasks, but I'm finding that some websites no longer work properly. For example, I might be able to fill in an online form, but clicking the Submit button doesn't do anything. Sometimes the iPad freezes for a few seconds. A friend suggested this behaviour might be a deliberate move by Apple, presumably to make me buy a new iPad. Is this true? Is there anything I can do other than buy a new one?

Tony Elliot

A Apple hasn't deliberately hobbled your iPad. The device is simply showing its age. The iOS version you're using was released in 2018, but your tablet is even older: iOS 12.5.7 is simply the last version of the operating system your iPad can run. This means your model is probably an iPad Air or iPad Mini 2, both released in 2013. In technological terms, a 12-year-old tablet is practically an antique.



Go to Safari's Experimental Features to squeeze extra life out of an old iPad...



...then activate the features two at a time to check for problems

More to the point, the Apple Safari web browser we assume you're using hasn't received a significant update for seven years. Web technology has moved on in that time, so many modern websites will use features your dated browser can't handle. This situation will only get worse.

If you're not ready to buy a new iPad just yet, you may be able to keep your old one going for a bit longer by enabling Safari's 'experimental' features. There are too many to list here, but most of them wouldn't be considered 'experimental' by today's standards, and they might allow some of the problem websites you

mentioned to work properly. Open Settings then, on the left, tap Safari. Next, on the right, tap Advanced followed by Experimental Features (see screenshot above left).

You'll see a list of features with sliders beside each one (see screenshot above). You could probably turn them all on without causing any problems. However, if you have the patience, it's better to activate a couple at a time, then visit a few websites in Safari to check all is well before activating a couple more. This way, if a problem arises, you'll know which feature to switch off again.

Can I downgrade my Apple smart speaker?

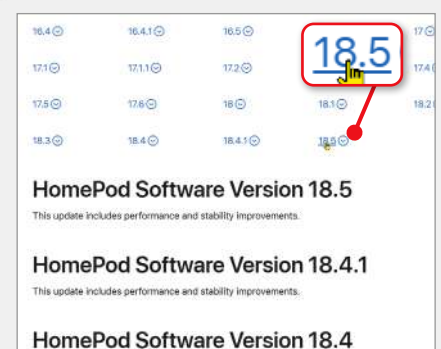
Q I bought an Apple HomePod Mini smart speaker (pictured right) two years ago. I've been very happy with it, but recently when pairing it with a new device, the HomePod Mini automatically upgraded from AudioOS 14.6 to 18.4. I don't like this new version of the operating system, so I want to wipe AudioOS 18.4 and go back to AudioOS 14.6. Is this possible?

Alexander James

A You may already suspect that the answer is no, but we're sharing your question to spare you and other readers any further frustration. It's a harsh fact that Apple keeps tight control of everything about its devices and the operating systems



You can't officially downgrade the operating system on Apple's HomePod Mini smart speaker



Check the latest version of the 'AudioOS' on Apple's website

they run. In short, upgrading is a one-way process, so once a device has received the latest operating system update, there's no official way back.

We say 'official' because there's an unofficial process known as 'jailbreaking' that can sometimes let users change the system software on Apple devices. The company has made this increasingly difficult over the years, however, and it's possible only on certain devices.

At the moment, jailbreaking a HomePod is practically impossible, so your only hope is that Apple's future updates will be more to your liking. Since we received your email, the company released HomePod Software Version 18.5 (the official name for what many people call AudioOS), so try that. You can keep an eye out for updates on the Apple page at www.snipca.com/55219 (pictured above).

Why do my DAB radio's batteries drain so fast?

Q I recently bought a Roberts Play 10 digital radio (pictured below) to replace an older Roberts analogue radio that had stopped working. I find that the four AA batteries don't last anywhere near as long in this modern radio as they did in the old one. Is this a common trait with DAB radios?

Brian Williams

A In short, yes. That's because as well as radio circuitry, a modern DAB radio also has to power the small computer processor that decodes the digital DAB signal. This isn't exactly a huge amount of energy, but the draw is continuous, so batteries will drain more quickly than they would in an equivalent analogue radio. This is the trade-off for crackle-free audio when tuning in via DAB.

With your particular radio, however, you're not limited to receiving DAB broadcasts. If you can get a good FM signal for your favourite stations, use that instead by pressing and holding the Menu/Mode button on your set to switch to analogue listening.

Our guess is that listening to the FM broadcast rather than DAB will extend your radio's battery life considerably – perhaps doubling your portable listening time, or even more.



The Roberts Play 10 radio receives both DAB and FM broadcasts

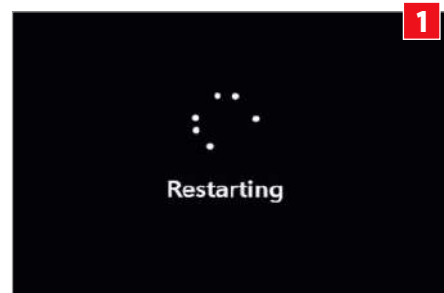
Why does Windows Update take so long on my PC?

Q Windows Update has been telling me for a while now that my PC requires an update pending a restart and will do so outside active hours, but it never does. When this happened before, I eventually clicked the 'Restart now' button. The screen went black with just the word 'Restarting' in the centre (see screenshot 1), and it stayed like this for nearly an hour. I decided not to reboot in case it interrupted the process. About six hours later, it eventually installed and restarted my PC. Is this common?

More recently, I left an update running overnight. It evidently failed because it hasn't installed, but there's no 'Restart now' button. Should I force the update?

John Perkins

A The inner workings of Windows Update are a mystery to all of us outside Microsoft, but it certainly has more than its fair share of quirks. Unfortunately, slow installations and failed updates are among them.



If an update fails it can leave your computer 'Restarting' for hours

We'd advise against forcing the update because there's a good chance Windows Update encountered a known issue, and intentionally undid its work. We can't tell you what this might be, but it's likely that something in your setup is subject to what the company calls a 'safeguard hold'. You can visit Microsoft's web page at www.snipca.com/55220 for a list of current issues, including safeguard holds 2. Microsoft works continuously to fix these and updates the database regularly.

As your PC is running well right now, we'd simply wait until Windows Update offers something new to install.

Issue	Status	Resolution
Some apps used reported errors on Windows 11, 24H2 devices while running App attach applications.	N/A	Mitigated 2024-04-11 10:06 PT
Wallpaper customization applications might not work as expected. Multiple applications are affected. A compatibility hold is in place, updating applications might resolve the issue.	N/A	Confirmed 2024-04-04 12:23 PT
Devices with apps using graphics driver might stop responding. We have applied a safeguard hold to prevent affected devices from updating to version 24H2 and encountering this issue.	N/A	Confirmed 2024-03-25 14:18 PT
Some devices that have Intel Arcs with Intel Graphics might lose audio output. Affected devices will not be offered the update to Windows 11, version 24H2 until this issue is resolved.	N/A	Confirmed 2024-03-25 14:18 PT
Camera user might cause some applications to become unresponsive. Only a limited set of devices which use object recognition are confirmed to be impacted by this issue.	N/A	Confirmed 2024-03-25 14:18 PT
Some devices using Intel Arcs might stop responding and receive a blue screen. Other driver versions of the Intel Arcs application are incompatible with Windows 11, version 24H2.	N/A	Confirmed 2024-03-25 14:18 PT
Compatibility issues with Intel Smart Sound Technology drivers. Windows 11, version 24H2 devices with the affected Intel SST driver might receive an error with a blue screen.	N/A	Confirmed 2024-03-25 14:18 PT

Microsoft's list of 'safeguard holds' can help you see what's blocking your update

Q: What's eating all my laptop's storage?

A: Issue 695, page 65 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from
www.snipca.com/53433



Why won't my PC shut down properly?

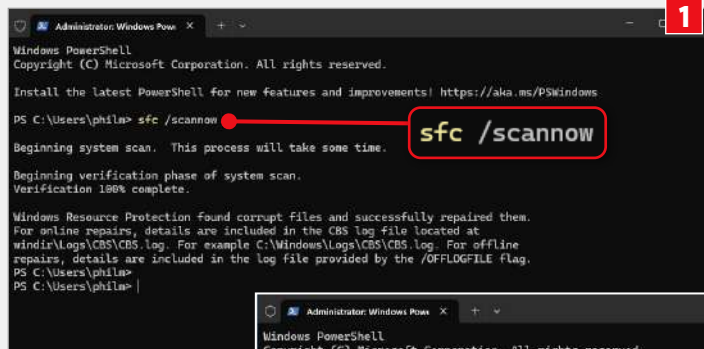
Q Since my last Windows update, whenever I shut down my computer I see an error message that says Task Host is stopping background tasks. I've tried various solutions I found online, including uninstalling the update, but can't fix it. I currently get round the problem by using the Shut Down Anyway option, but I'd like to stop it happening if possible.

David Clark

A It sounds like something was corrupted during the update. Running a couple of **command-line** clean-up routines should help. You can carry these out using the System File Checker (SFC) and Deployment Image Servicing and Management (DISM) tools.

First, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then choose either 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)' or 'Terminal (Admin)' – depending on whether you're using Windows 10 or 11. Either option will open a **PowerShell** window, into which you'll type the necessary instructions.

Now type **sfc /scannow** (see screenshot 1), then press Enter and wait for the scan to complete. This



```
Administrator: Windows PowerShell
Windows PowerShell
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Install the latest PowerShell for new features and improvements! https://aka.ms/PSWindows

PS C:\Users\philip> sfc /scannow

Beginning system scan. This process will take some time.

Beginning verification phase of system scan.
Verification 100% complete.

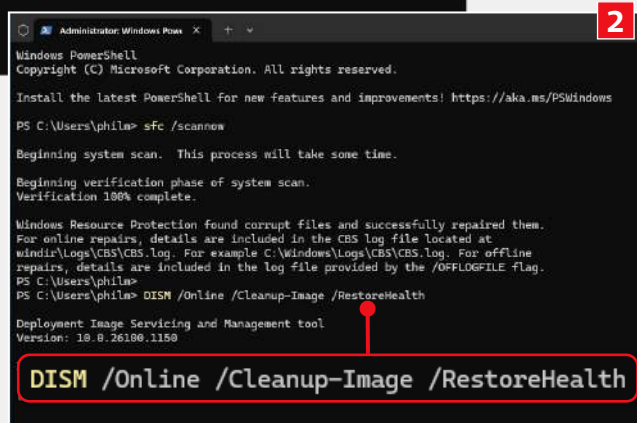
Windows Resource Protection found corrupt files and successfully repaired them.
For online repairs, details are included in the CBS log file located at
windir\Logs\CBS\CBS.log. For example C:\Windows\Logs\CBS\CBS.log. For offline
repairs, details are included in the log file provided by the /OFFLOGFILE flag.
PS C:\Users\philip>
```

1 Run the System File Checker to find and repair corrupted files

checks your system files for errors and tries to repair them automatically. Note that the process is likely to take several minutes, so be patient. Now restart your PC.

If that doesn't fix the problem, return to the PowerShell window but this time type

DISM /Online /Cleanup-Image /RestoreHealth 2 and press Enter. You can copy this command from our Pastebin page at www.snipca.com/55221 and paste it in. Windows will perform a deeper scan, checking the integrity of your



```
Administrator: Windows PowerShell
Windows PowerShell
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Install the latest PowerShell for new features and improvements! https://aka.ms/PSWindows

PS C:\Users\philip> sfc /scannow

Beginning system scan. This process will take some time.

Beginning verification phase of system scan.
Verification 100% complete.

Windows Resource Protection found corrupt files and successfully repaired them.
For online repairs, details are included in the CBS log file located at
windir\Logs\CBS\CBS.log. For example C:\Windows\Logs\CBS\CBS.log. For offline
repairs, details are included in the log file provided by the /OFFLOGFILE flag.
PS C:\Users\philip> DISM /Online /Cleanup-Image /RestoreHealth

Deployment Image Servicing and Management tool
Version: 10.0.26100.1150
```

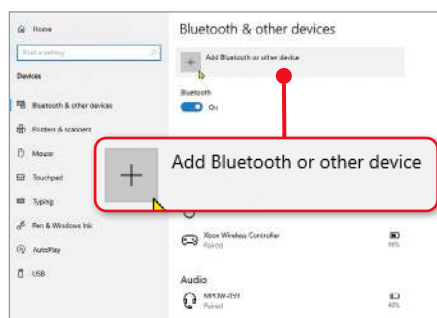
DISM checks your entire Windows system and replaces any damaged files with fresh copies from Microsoft's servers

system image. If it finds any problems, it will try to download and replace any corrupted files from Microsoft's servers. Expect this process to take even longer. Again, restart your PC once that's done.

Can I use Alexa as a laptop speaker?

Q The speaker built into my laptop is terrible, with a weak, tinny sound. While asking Alexa for the weather forecast the other day, it occurred to me that I might be able to connect my laptop to my Amazon Echo smart speaker and use that. The Echo sits on a shelf in my living room, so when I use the laptop on my sofa, it would be nice if I could use its superior-quality speaker to listen to whatever's playing on my laptop. I already listen to the free version of Amazon Music on my Echo, but it often seems to play the wrong thing, and besides I'd also like to get better audio when watching YouTube videos. Can I route all my laptop's audio to the Echo speaker?

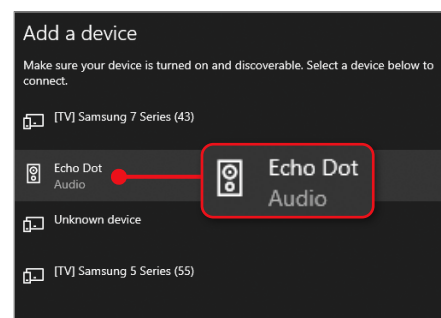
Richard Sumrall



To pair a new device go to Settings, Devices, 'Bluetooth & other devices', and click '+'...

A Many people, like you, speak directly to Alexa on their Echo to play music from a streaming service, so it's easy to forget that these devices also have Bluetooth connectivity. This will let you do what you need.

First, on your laptop, click the Start button followed by the Settings cog, and then Devices followed by 'Bluetooth & other devices'. Here, click the plus ('+')



...then say "Alexa, pair" to your Echo speaker, and it should appear in your PC's list of devices

button next to 'Add Bluetooth or other device' (see screenshot above left). Then, within earshot of your Echo speaker, say "Alexa, pair". Within a second or two, your Echo should appear in the 'Add a device' list on your PC (see screenshot above). Simply click the entry to connect. Now when you want to connect or disconnect, just say "Alexa, connect" or "Alexa, disconnect".

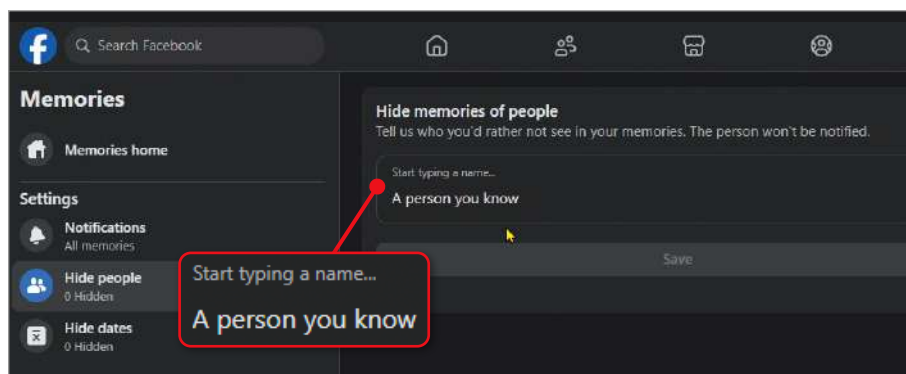
Problems Solved

How do I stop Facebook birthday reminders of late friends and family?

Q I'm sure that many users of social media, like me, feel a sense of grief after losing friends and loved ones then receiving reminders of their birthdays. Can we pressurise outlets such as Facebook to remove this feature so we no longer get reminders of birthdays? I understand that we can block specific people, but who wants to block a lost family member?

Bradley Wyatt

A This is a sensitive area, so no solution is likely to satisfy everyone. You mentioned Facebook, so we'll focus on that, but all the big social-media companies have



You can control whose memories you see in Facebook by hiding those you don't want

similar procedures.

Facebook gives you a couple of options. Ideally, the next of kin should submit a 'memorialisation request' using the appropriate Facebook form, at www.snipca.com/55214. If the company accepts the request, it in effect freezes the person's Facebook page, applying a 'Remembering' label next to their name. This also pauses birthday reminders and so on. It might be worth sending a polite message to a relative

to ask if they would be able to do this.

If a family member has not requested memorialisation, in theory any Facebook friend could do it, but they would need to provide a recognised document of death.

You can also control whose 'memories' Facebook shows you, whether they're living or dead. Visit www.facebook.com/memories, search for the person's name (see screenshot) and then set your preferences.

Can I make Picasa work on my Windows 11 laptop?

Q I've been using Picasa (pictured below) for many years and love how easy it is. I know Google has discontinued it, but it still works on my Windows 10 laptop. Now I'm thinking of buying a new Windows 11 laptop. Will Picasa still work on that too?

Ronnie Brown

A It will, but with some caveats. First, Google no longer offers Picasa for download, so you'll have to go elsewhere for it. Thankfully,

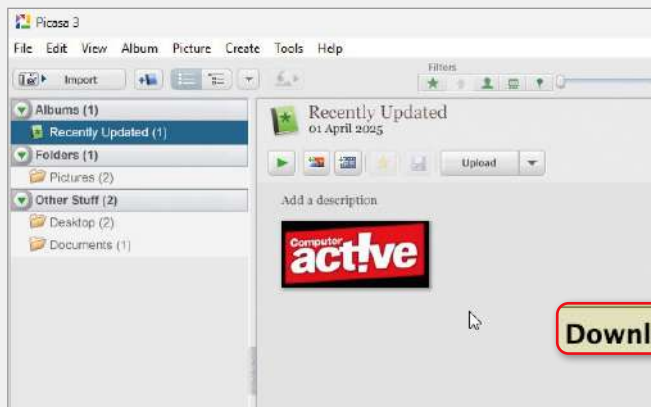
a few reputable sites still host the download. For example, Major Geeks offers the last version (3.9 Build 141.303, see screenshot below right). Visiting www.snipca.com/55215 downloads it directly.

Even with the latest download, any attempts to use Picasa's online features will result in an error message, because Google has disabled all the services that allowed these to work. We think you'll already be aware of this, because you say you've never stopped using Picasa.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly,

continuing to use Picasa could be risky. Google will never fix any new flaws that come to light, which means hackers would be free to exploit them. Picasa probably doesn't have enough users these days to make it a target for hackers, but it's always worth keeping this in mind.

Checking in with an online security service such as CVE Details (www.snipca.com/55216), which monitors new and known vulnerabilities across a huge number of products, will help you make an informed decision.



The desktop version of Picasa 3 still works – even in Windows 11 – but none of the program's online features are available



Reputable download sites, such as Major Geeks, still offer the latest version of Picasa, despite Google retiring it in 2016



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

mWh and mAh on batteries?

Q I recently bought some rechargeable EBL AA batteries with built-in USB-C charging ports (www.snipca.com/55217, pictured). The number on the label says 3,500mWh, which is a bigger number than on my old rechargeables. Looking closer, however, I realised my old Duracells say 2,500mAh, rather than quoting a figure in mWh.

I'm no expert, so don't understand the difference. Have I been scammed?
Tony Brunswick

A We wouldn't say you've been scammed, but the marketing around battery capacities can be confusing, and we're sure some companies use this to their advantage.

As you've already noticed, your new batteries have a capacity measured in milliwatt-hours (mWh), while your old ones are rated in milliamp-hours (mAh). Given that these numbers are printed in a bigger font than the units, anyone would be forgiven for not noticing this.

However, knowing the difference is

important for understanding why your new batteries might perform less well than the old ones. An mAh figure is a measure of electric charge, or how much current a battery can supply over time. A mWh figure, on the other hand, is a measure of energy – or how much total work a cell can do taking voltage into account.

This is where the marketing trickery comes in. Your old Duracell AA batteries are probably nickel-metal hydride (NiMH), rated at around 1.2V. To get the mWh figure for these, we multiply 2,500mAh by 1.2V, giving 3,000mWh.

Your EBL batteries, on the other hand, are **lithium-ion** (li-ion), which typically run at a higher voltage internally. Their built-in electronics regulate this down to a constant 1.5V output. If we convert their 3500mWh back into mAh – by dividing by 1.5V – we get a figure of around 2,333mAh.

So, despite the larger number on the



Check which units a battery is quoting, or you may be misled

side of the batteries, your fancy new USB-C rechargeables actually store less charge overall than your Duracell batteries (2333mAh compared with 2500mAh). Since the new li-ion batteries also have to power a tiny onboard controller and voltage regulator, which drain a little energy themselves, it's no surprise they've left you feeling short-changed.

So, again, we wouldn't say you've been conned, and having a built-in USB-C charging socket on your batteries is very convenient. But if you rely solely on the numbers printed on the sides of batteries, it's important to make sure you're not comparing apples with pears.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

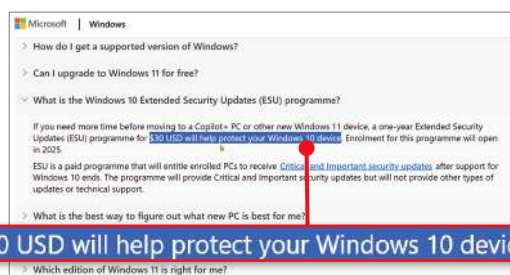
Will it be safe to use a Windows 10 laptop with my TV?

Q I can't upgrade my ageing Windows 10 laptop to Windows 11, so I've bought a new one. I decided to connect my old laptop to my Samsung TV using an **HDMI** cable so I can just watch YouTube videos on it. I've uninstalled every other program except Norton Security. When support for Windows 10 ends, will it still be safe to use my laptop in this way?

Ken Webster

A We're sure to get many similar questions in the run-up to Microsoft's 14 October end-of-life date for Windows 10, but fundamentally the answer is the same. When Microsoft ends support for Windows 10 it will become significantly less safe, though you can still use it if you're careful.

Microsoft will continue to offer both



You can pay to extend Windows 10 support beyond the official cut-off date

free and paid-for support, at US\$30 (around £23, see screenshot) for only one year (businesses get up to three years) – see www.snipca.com/55218 for details. If you take this option, you can safely use Windows 10 for at least a further 12 months.

What's more, with hundreds of millions of people still running Windows 10 worldwide, we're confident that if some critical flaw were to surface soon after the supposed cut-off point,

Microsoft would release a fix, free of charge. It has done this previously, because not doing so would create mountains of bad publicity.

However, that doesn't mean you should be complacent, so make sure you apply any Windows 10 emergency patches that Microsoft releases.

Next Issue

ONSALE
Weds
13 Aug

- How do I connect my old speakers?
- What's causing my screen to go blank?
- Can I rescue my locked DVD player? ...And many more

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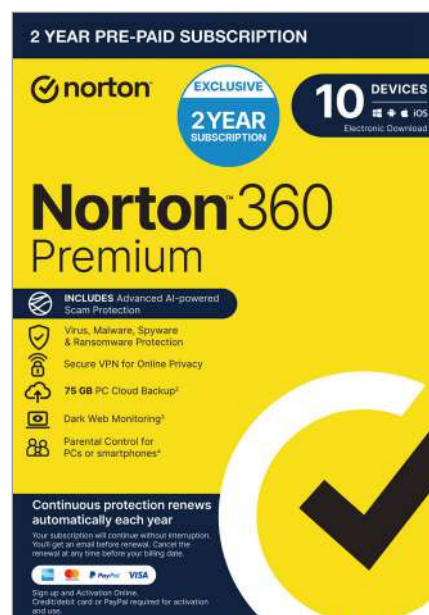
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Problems **Solved**

Reader Support

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Were you too pessimistic about running Windows 11 on unsupported PCs?

Q I was surprised to read Jonathan Parkyn's comment in his 'Should you ditch Windows 10 for Linux?' feature (Issue 711, page 60) that Windows 10 users can't upgrade to Windows 11 "without attempting convoluted and risky hacks". Yet back in Issue 693's Cover Feature ('Windows 10 is doomed'), Robert Irvine explained exactly how to upgrade to Windows 11 if your computer didn't meet the necessary requirements. I followed Robert's advice, and my PC is running perfectly well with Windows 11 installed. So, was Jonathan being unnecessarily pessimistic?

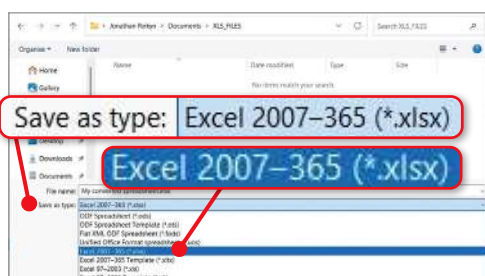
Barry Shaw

A We don't think it's a case of being optimistic or pessimistic. Rather, we've tried to be responsible by explaining both the benefits and risks of bypassing Microsoft's restrictions to run Windows 11 – as Robert did in his Cover Feature. Upgrading an unsupported PC isn't easy and won't suit everyone, which is why we offered alternative options elsewhere in the same feature, such as buying a **refurbished** Windows 11 PC, or installing ChromeOS Flex or Linux.

Can MultiDoc Converter convert to .xlsx?

Q In Issue 712 (page 71) you showed John Blakemore how he could use the program MultiDoc Converter (www.snipca.com/54930) to convert Word files with the .doc extension to .docx. I tried the program and it works well. But John also asked about .xls files, and the program doesn't seem to deal with this Excel suffix. Can you suggest a means of changing these to the latest **xlsx** format please?

Mike Boardman



Click File, Save As, then choose 'Excel 2007-365 (*.xlsx)' to convert your .xls files

A You're correct – MultiDoc Converter works for multiple formats, including .doc, .rtf and .xml, but not .xls. Sorry we didn't make this clear. Currently, there are no equivalent tools we would recommend for batch-converting Excel files. Online file converters, such as Zamzar (www.zamzar.com) are best avoided, partly because you often have to pay for any more than a couple of conversions per day. And partly because you may not feel comfortable uploading the sort of sensitive information typically contained in Excel spreadsheets to an online service.

Instead, we'd suggest converting files by opening LibreOffice Calc, then using the Save As option from the File menu and choosing 'Excel 2007-365 (*.xlsx)' from the 'Save as type' dropdown menu (see screenshot above).

There's also a hidden batch-conversion tool in LibreOffice, but you can only use it through the **command line**. First, place all your .xls files in one folder, then name it XLS_FILES and put it in your Documents folder. Now click Start, type **cmd** and press Enter. Type **cd C:\Users\YourName\Documents\XLS_Files** and press Enter (replace YourName with your Windows name).

Now type **"C:\Program Files\LibreOffice\program\soffice.exe" --headless --convert-to xlsx:"Calc MS Excel 2007 XML" *.xls** and press Enter. You can copy and paste these commands from www.snipca.com/55322 and www.snipca.com/55323 respectively.

Why won't my iPhone show up in Windows?

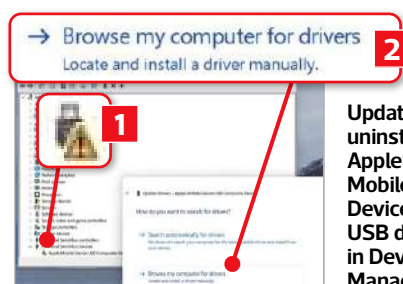
Q I've tried moving my music from my Windows 11 PC to my iPhone using iTunes, as you advised Michael Parker (Issue 712, page 20). But when I connect my iPhone, it doesn't appear in Windows. What's wrong?

David Maudsley

A There are several things to try. We'll assume you've checked the cable and connector. Is your iPhone unlocked when you connect it? You may also see a 'Trust this Computer' message on your iPhone screen when you connect it. You'll need to tap Trust before you can access the phone from your PC.

If those don't work, it's probably a problem with Apple's Mobile Device USB driver. Right-click Start and select Device Manager. Look under 'Universal Serial Bus devices' for Apple's Mobile Device USB driver – there may be an exclamation mark on the icon to indicate a problem (1 in screenshot below). Right-click it and select 'Update driver' then select 'Browse my computer for drivers' (2) followed by 'Let me pick from a list of available drivers on my computer'. Click 'Apple Mobile Device USB Composite Device', then click Next to reinstall the driver.

If it still won't connect, right-click Apple's Mobile Device USB driver in Device Manager, and this time select 'Uninstall device'. Tick the 'Attempt to remove the driver for this device' box and click Uninstall. Unplug your iPhone, restart your PC, then plug your iPhone back in. The driver will reinstall itself, and you may be asked to restart your PC.



Jargon Buster

1080p/1440p High-definition video of 1920x1080 and 2560x1440 pixels respectively.

2G/3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

2K Video with 2048x1080 pixels.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

8K Video with a resolution of 7680x4320 pixels.

Adaptive brightness A feature that automatically adjusts your screen's brightness based on the surrounding light.

Airplane mode Phones and tablets in this mode disable all radio communication.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

BIOS Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Blue light Light given off by PC and phone screens.

Bootable Describes a device or disc with system files on it so it can be used to start up your computer.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot An AI program designed to recreate conversation with humans.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Command line A way to control a computer by typing instructions one at a time.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

CPU Another term for a computer processor.

CSV A standard file format, used for storing information in tables that can be opened by most spreadsheet programs.

DAB Digital Audio Broadcast. Technology that allows more radio stations to be broadcast and in a higher quality.

Dark theme Showing white text on a black background.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Distro A version of the Linux OS and the programs that go with it.

DNG Digital Negative. A photo file that stores raw image data. Used by photographers to preserve quality.

DOC/DOCX The default file formats used up to and after Word 2007 respectively.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Dual-band A Wi-Fi router that operates on 2.4 and 5GHz.

End-to-end encryption A way of encrypting messages so that the only people who can read them are the sender and recipient.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows.

FAT32 An older system used for formatting hard drives.

Field of view The amount of space measured in angles that can be seen from the camera lens.

Firmware Software stored on hardware to control its operation.

Flight mode Devices in this mode disable Wi-Fi and Bluetooth.

Frame rate The number of still images, or frames, shown per second to create a moving image.

Freemium A business model where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

GEDCOM A file format used by genealogy programs to share data.

GIF A type of image file often used on the web.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GPU A chip designed to handle 3D graphics.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

Greyscale The range of grey shades from white to black, used on mono screens and print-outs.

HDMI Connection that transmits high-definition video and audio.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

Image file A file that contains a complete copy of everything from a CD, DVD or hard drive.

IP address A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours.

ISO file A type of image file.

JavaScript An older programming language developers use to make web pages interactive.

JPEG A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

LAN A computer network in one place, such as a home or office.

Large language model A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Lithium-ion A rechargeable energy storage device for electronics.

M.2 A standard specification for PC expansion cards and connectors.

Machine learning The science of teaching computers how to learn without further human input.

Manifest V3 Third version of the software that runs Chrome browser extensions.

Membrane keyboard Keyboards that use rubber domes that connect to small electrical contacts.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

Mini HDMI An HDMI connector measuring 10.42x2.42 mm.

Noise Visible dust-like speckles that appear in some camera and TV images.

OCR Optical character recognition. Scanning and converting text into documents that can be edited.

OLED A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in PC and TV screens.

PAC A unique code that lets users retain their mobile telephone number when switching operators.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

PNG A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

PowerShell A Windows tool for automating commands.

Progressive web app A website that looks and works like an app on computers, phones and tablets.

QR code A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

RAW A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it.

Read speed How long it takes a hard drive to 'read' data, and respond to it.

Recovery key A password to access a locked account.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device repaired by its manufacturer so it can be resold and reused.

Registry key The Windows registry equivalent of a folder.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data via overseas mobile networks.

RTF A file format used to transfer files between different types of word-processing programs.

RW2 RAW photo file used by Panasonic cameras.

Scissor switch Keys that have two plastic pieces that interlock in a scissor-like fashion.

Script A short program that is stored on a web server to control part of a website.

SD card A popular type of memory card.

Secure Boot A security standard designed to make sure your PC avoids malware when booting.

SIM The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors.

SSID A name used to identify a wireless network.

System image A backup which includes your operating system, drivers, PC settings, programs and files.

TIF A standard file format used to store graphics images.

TPM A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

TXT A basic file format that contains nothing but text.

UEFI A modern replacement for the BIOS.

Upscale Creating a larger version of a photo without sacrificing clarity and detail.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-A The original type of USB connector, released in 1996.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VoIP The routing of voice conversations over the internet.

VPN Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAN Wide Area Network. Exists over a large geographical area.

Whitelist A list of allowed websites, email addresses and programs used by security software.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Wi-Fi 7 Faster successor to Wi-Fi 6, with an estimated maximum speed of around 46Gbps.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Write speed How long it takes a hard drive to save data.

XDI A compressed disk image format created by WinArchiver, used to store and compress ISO files with added features like password protection.

XLX/XLSX The default file formats for Microsoft Excel before and after version 2007.

XML A versatile type of document that can store various types of data.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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3		Fibre 2	£25.00 £27.49 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	67Mbps avg. speed	£75 Gift Card	£232.47
4		5G Hub	£19.00 £21.00 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	150Mbps avg. speed	N/a	£234.00

* Payments based on 12x monthly cost (including price rise) minus reward value

*Reward subject to change. Available as of 16th July 2025.



Easy when you **Know How**

Looking for a cheap way to expand his screen space, Robert Irvine tries to...



Turn an old tablet into a monitor

In this issue's column I was supposed to be trying to charge my phone using solar power, but sadly I got the timing wrong. After weeks of blazing sunshine, the weather has turned overcast, so my solar-charging test will have to wait.

In the meantime, I've turned my attention to the screen of my Windows 11 laptop, which is no longer fulfilling my workspace needs. Measuring a mere 13 inches diagonally, it doesn't offer enough 'screen real estate' (as the experts say) to display everything I want.

“

As if by magic, my iPad displayed my Windows 11 desktop

”

Aside from my browser, I usually have at least 10 programs, apps and folders open at any given time. Some are minimised to the taskbar while others lurk in the background, jostling for space.

The obvious solution is to buy a second monitor (my main one is being used by my Windows 10 PC) and create a dual-screen setup that doubles the size of my desktop. But I don't have much physical desk space, and would rather spend my money on a bigger desk.

So I was excited to learn about a screen-sharing app called GlideX (www.snipca.com/55571), which – among other things – lets you turn any PC, phone or tablet into a second monitor. It's made by Asus but isn't limited to that company's monitors and is free to use with no apparent catches.

As my phone is too small to serve as a monitor, I figured the best device to use as a second screen would be my old iPad



GlideX successfully turned Robert's iPad into a second monitor for his laptop

(eighth generation, released in 2020). This has a 10.2in high-resolution display and wasn't doing much aside from sitting in a drawer waiting for the next iOS update.

On my laptop, I installed the GlideX app from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/55573). Apart from asking me to choose between 'China service' and 'Global service' (Asus is Taiwanese), this was very straightforward, although the QR code for downloading the mobile app didn't work. Instead I installed GlideX on my iPad via the Apple App Store (www.snipca.com/55575) and allowed it to detect nearby devices.

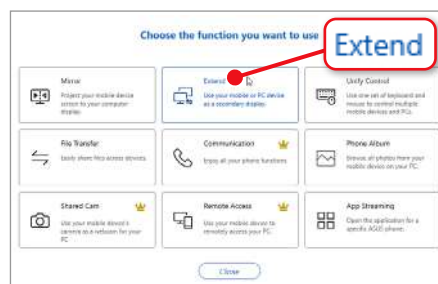
In the Windows version, I clicked Start Now and selected Extend as the function I wanted to use (see screenshot below). GlideX then searched for devices on the same Wi-Fi network, found my iPad and sent it a request to extend the laptop's screen. I tapped Accept and, as if by

magic, my iPad instantly displayed my Windows 11 desktop (pictured above). I hadn't even signed up for – or into – an account.

Rather than mirror my laptop (though that's also an option), GlideX had given me an extra desktop, almost doubling my available screen space. I was able to drag my cursor from one device to the other – either using my laptop's trackpad or the iPad's touchscreen – and easily move items between them.

This meant I could shift software and folder windows, and individual files, from my Windows 11 desktop to the extended iPad screen. I could also open and operate files and programs with my finger, rather than pointing and clicking. Cleverly, GlideX saves details of items you move to the second screen, so they're automatically restored after you disconnect and reconnect the devices.

I was very impressed by GlideX's simplicity, and by the fact you can use it for free without registering. Signing up for an Asus account unlocks extra features such as remote access, and lets you extend your screen to more than two devices. But I imagine that could get quite confusing, so a dual-desktop is enough for me.



Extending your display in GlideX is surprisingly straightforward

✉ Need help with your monitors? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

PHASE

Alpha Phase [IVY31]



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